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THE UNCLE'S CRIME

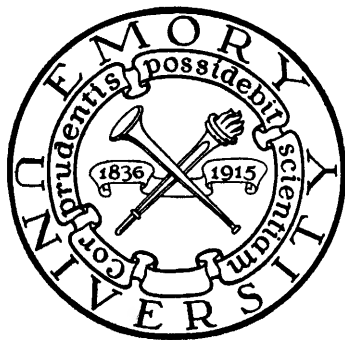
OR

THE DOCTOR'S BEAUTIFUL WARD



CAMERON & FERGUSON, GLASGOW & LONDON

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CHAPTER I.

THE NICHE IN THE WALL.

SOMETIME in the year 17—, a very singular thing happened to one Jean Louis, an honest bricklayer, who lived at a place called Old Barrack, in a humble, low-roofed wooden house, so near the Mississippi, that the sound of its hurrying waters made nocturnal music for his ears, which lulled him to tranquil sleep after the labours and cares of the day. Jean Louis was poor—which he would not have been if he could have had his own way about it—and often found it extremely difficult to procure the means of subsisting his wife and children. It was night, and a marvelously dark night too. Jean Louis sat thoughtfully before the door of his dwelling, with his brown forehead in his hand palm, quite unconscious that night had drawn so sombre a curtain around him. He was thinking how he should provide for his pretty wife and daughter, and the curly-headed boy who was nestling at his feet. The bricklayer was, in fact, contemplating the rugged side of the world. The stopping of a vehicle near his house caused him to lift his head and look furtively into the darkness; but he

was not thoroughly aroused from his gloomy abstraction until two persons approached, one of whom asked: "Are you Jean Louis, the bricklayer?"

"Unfortunately I am," replied Jean. The person who had addressed this question produced a dark lantern, and held it close to the bricklayer's face.

"You are sure that there is no mistake?" he added.

"I am Jean Louis, the bricklayer, monsieur."

"Very well, Jean Louis! You are to go with us," returned the man with the lantern.

"When?" asked Jean, his apathetic manner perceptibly changing to surprise.

"Immediately," was the authoritative reply. "But first you must be blindfolded."

"But, messieurs—this—this—to say the least, is— is not agreeable!" stammered Jean, beginning to feel uneasy. He noticed, moreover, for the first time, that both of the men wore masks, and that their persons were concealed by long black cloaks.

"You will make no objections!" said he who had hitherto spoken, in a tone so decisive that the bricklayer perceived that resistance would be useless, unless he were physically able to overpower both his strange visitors. "Your handicraft is needed at a certain place. You are poor; gold, Jean Louis, will not come amiss. You shall be well paid, and your labour will be light. If you resist, you will be taken by force."

The speaker drew a broad strip of thick cloth from beneath his cloak, and gave it to his companion, who doubled it in impervious folds.

"You will submit to be blindfolded." The voice of the unknown was still more resolute.

"But my tools—they are in the house," said Jean.

"The proper implements of your craft are provided," was the brief response.

His mysterious visitors took each an arm, and hurried him into the vehicle, which was but a few paces distant. They followed, seated themselves beside him, the door was closed by another hand, and the carriage put in rapid motion. When the nocturnal drive terminated, the bricklayer was taken from the carriage. One thing he was certain of: he was near the Mississippi; he could hear the sweep of its strong and turbulent waters within a few yards of where he stood.

Jean was led a short distance by the hand, when a momentary pause was made. He heard a key grate harshly in a lock, then a door was pushed open, which creaked from disuse. The door was closed, and the bolt shot back to its place. They crossed a space of some extent, and descended a long flight of steps. The time consumed in the descent assured him that he was many feet below the level of the river. He wondered if he were in a tomb, but could recollect none so near the Mississippi. The dampness chilled the poor bricklayer; he had an impression that he walked in a circle some time—which was an artifice resorted to, he expected, to deceive him and prevent any possible recognition of the place at any future period. Finally, after what appeared a long interval to Jean, he was permitted to stop. The blind was removed from his eyes.

"Here," said the principal conductor, "lies your work."

The sharp, blinding focus of the dark lantern was turned upon the bricklayer's face, embarrassing for a few seconds his vision. When he could see clearly, a spectacle met his sight that he was destined never to forget. Directly before him was a niche about eight

feet square, in a wall of solid stone masonry. Sitting upon the ground, his back to the wall, his head resting unconsciously against the damp stones, and breathing heavily, was a man, of whose age and condition Jean could form no definite opinion. Jean's conductor pointed to a pile of bricks and a box of mortar, with the implements of his calling lying beside them. "Build a wall across that niche!"

The man's voice was so cold and relentless that the bricklayer shivered with terror. The dreadful purpose of the mask was now but too apparent. The unfortunate being before him was to be entombed alive in that narrow sepulchre; and the time-defying, pitiless masonry would tell no tale of his fate, perhaps, till the then living generation and actors in the scene had passed away for ever. The bricklayer trembled. The *silent* mask stood on his left, holding the dark lantern; the *speaking* mask on his right, with a brace of cocked duelling-pistols in his hands. "WORK!" said the latter.

The miserable Jean seized a chalk line; he chalked, and stretched it across the open space by two nails thrust into the ground, and then snatching up the trowel with spasmodic haste, spread a coating of mortar, and began to place the bricks. There was a medicinal smell in the air. Jean Louis detected the odour of laudanum; it came from the doomed man's breath. "Drugged!" said the bricklayer to himself. Then he mentally asked Jean Louis if he would finish the task before the victim recovered consciousness. If the deed must be done, he hoped so sincerely. As he laid brick after brick, he could not help picturing how shocking such an awakening would be. The trowel shook in his hand, and the mortar was scattered over his work.

"Hang up your lantern," said the master of these portentous ceremonies to the subordinate mask. "The man will work better if we stand back a little."

"Monsieur Louis, cease your trepidations. When that wall is completed, you will go forth unharmed."

"I cannot work while you look at me!" cried the bricklayer.

"Very well. We will pace to and fro, and not observe you; but I swear to ye, Monsieur Bricklayer, that if your work be imperfectly done, you shall not leave this vault alive! Leave so much an air-hole as a grain of sand would fill, and you shall find yourself the wrong side of that masonry!"

The mask pointed to the wall, which was now nearly as high as Jean's knees. Awed by this threat, the bricklayer resumed his distasteful employment, the figures of the two masks being seen in the dim background, moving spectrally to and fro. With every brick that passed through his hands, and every trowel of mortar that he spread, he looked at the unfortunate whose grave he was making. The man slowly raised his hands and made a singular motion. The bricklayer stood paralysed an instant, then made a corresponding movement with his trowel. A flush of colour and of hope tinged the man's cheeks—some secret bond of sympathy had been established between him and Jean. The masonry grew rapidly under Jean Louis's busy fingers; it was breast high; it was to his chin; the doomed was being shut from his sight. Another layer, and the terrible task would be completed. Faint moans arose from behind the masonry, then hollow groans that grew louder, and when Jean Louis placed the last brick, a shriek, deadened by the interposing wall, reached his ears that

curdled his blood. He threw down his trowel and staggered from the spot.

The moment the finishing touch was given, the speaking mask seized the lantern, passed it hastily but carefully along the surface, nodded his head approvingly to his subordinate, who immediately conducted the bricklayer as before from the vault, and placed him in a carriage. He was driven home as silently as he had been driven from it; but in a state of mind that cannot be easily described. As the principal mask was assisting him to alight, he put a well-filled purse into his hand, and said, sternly: "Tell no human being what you have seen, heard, and done this night. Any attempt on your part to penetrate this mystery will certainly make your pretty wife Suzanne a widow. Jean Louis, you hold a dangerous secret; while it is safe, *you* will be; but if your imprudent tongue forgets its trust, the assassin's dagger will find you wherever you may go."

The poor bricklayer stood in the darkness, with the blind still over his eyes. He remained like one stupefied at the door of his dwelling, till the faithful Suzanne came out and caught him in her arms. She held the light up to his face, and questioned him. He kissed her and said: "*Do not ask me, Suzanne!*"

CHAPTER II.

DOCTOR MERIGNY.

ONE year after the event just related, Dr Paul Merigny was aroused from a profound sleep by a furious ringing of his night-bell. The yellow fever was prevailing, the doctor was weary with professional duties, and did not immediately answer the imperative summons. He

yawned, turned over, and his tired head fell upon the tempting pillow again; whereupon the impatient bell went into a convulsion of clangour that he could no longer ignore. He arose. Stepping into an ante-room adjoining his office, he threw up a window, and asked, "What is wanted?"

"Is it Dr Merigny who speaks?" demanded a voice.

"It is," answered the doctor, trying to discern the form of the questioner.

"Your services are required; come at once," was the instant response.

"Excuse me, my friend," he replied, coolly closing the window. "I am somewhat jaded, and it is absolutely necessary that I should sleep."

"Impossible!" cried the messenger, now speaking with his face close to the window-panes. "It is a critical case, and there must be no delay."

"There are plenty of doctors; you will find them at every turn of the streets."

"I tell you it will not do! I will not go without you. It is a matter of life and death; no common affair, I assure you."

"Yellow fever, I suppose?"

"Not in the least! I entreat you to hasten. Reflect how your conscience will accuse you, should you arrive too late."

Doctor Merigny put on his hat, placed a small medicine-case in his pocket, and opened the outer door. He saw the dim outlines of a carriage directly in front of his office, on Dauphine Street.

The person with whom the foregoing conversation had been carried on motioned him to enter, and took a seat beside him in the vehicle, which moved away

without loss of time. It rolled on and on, turning innumerable corners, until the doctor was quite bewildered in regard to their direction. The carriage stopped suddenly, the doctor got out and was hurried up a flight of steps. The walls of a large edifice loomed above him; he saw it, as shadows are sometimes seen to flit past a dimly-lighted window, vague and shapeless. He was ushered into a small reception room, which was faintly lighted by a hanging lamp. By-and-by he heard footsteps in an adjoining apartment—soft footsteps, and the rustling of silk. It was a woman's tread, and a woman's voice that said: "She is very ill, yet she bears it wondrously!" These words were pronounced in a low tone, but Merigny could not help hearing them. Some one who had evidently been a previous occupant of the room, seemed to be aroused from a state of reverie by this remark.

"Leonora!" he said. "You have been unskilful; you have hastened the catastrophe. You always needed restraint. The wisdom of the serpent is your true policy. Has he come?"

"Yes; he is in the next room. I wish to know more of him. You say he is not rich?"

"All men love gold," answered the masculine voice.

"Is he shrewd? is he acute?"

The woman's voice was still suppressed, soft, and clear, but singularly audible.

"He is reputed skilful."

"Reputed skilful!" repeated the other, in a dissatisfied tone. "He is young?"

"I don't know his age. What does it matter? He is devoted to his profession, and will do his best to save her. What more do you wish?"

"Speak low, De Villanville!"

Madame De Villanville, I am always guarded. His prudence should be equal to his zeal. A purpose hastily carried out is apt to be repented of."

I understand you, De Villanville; but, in my opinion, a thing once resolved upon cannot be too soon accomplished."

Have in the doctor, Madame De Villanville; and, dear, aid him all in your power to arrive at some definite respecting this mysterious malady. Ah! much we suffer in the person of Catholina?"

Leigny heard the tinkling of a bell, arose, crossed apartment, stretched himself upon a divan, and when a servant entered to summon him to the bedside of the patient, he was apparently asleep. His slumbers, however, must have been very light, for the footsteps of the messenger aroused him. He was conducted up a flight of stairs to a chamber fitted up with exquisite taste. His curiosity, it may be supposed, was by this time considerably excited. His first glance was toward the bed, on which reposed the person requiring his services. Never was he more surprised than at the vision that met his vision. A girl of about sixteen years, pale as a lily, was before him. Her large expectant eyes encountered his as he approached the couch, there was an evident effort on her part to suppress outward signs of suffering. Her respiration was short and hurried. Her white arms were tossed out from the immaculate linen, her face slightly turned toward the floor, while her dark hair was scattered in graceful disorder over the snowy pillow. She seemed to Doctor Leigny too lovely and saintly to belong to the common race of humanity. The exquisite whiteness of her

skin heightened immeasurably the effect of her sweet expression, which together with her surroundings, and the peculiar circumstances of the case, increased the doctor's wonder and interest, calling into action the best sympathies of his nature. Near the head of the bed sat a lady whose age might have been thirty-five years, with her brow and eyes partially hidden by a white hand. Her air was thoughtful, her attitude graceful and studied. Her features were strongly defined, full of character, with sufficient beauty to render them attractive. She kept her position like a piece of statuary, with the exception, perhaps, of a languid motion of the head when Merigny entered. At the bed's-foot, Doctor Paul perceived a fitting mate for this figure—a man of a dark and sombre visage, sitting upright in a straight-backed chair, with his eyes fixed gloomily upon the floor. He did not raise them until Merigny had advanced and laid his fingers upon the patient's wrist.

"A tableau!" thought the doctor. He was young in years, but not a person to be deceived. Of strong common-sense, of disciplined habits of thought, experienced in the winding ways of the world, quick of apprehension, and eminently logical in his deductions, he was the last person to be duped. He possessed, in a remarkable degree, the power of self-control. He comprehended without demonstrating that he comprehended; saw, without indicating that he perceived. His deportment was quiet and unpretentious. He never tried to create sensations, nor to impress others with his own greatness. He was faithful to what he attempted, asked but simple justice of his fellows, was firm in the right, and utterly indifferent to the praise

or blame of the vulgar, the presumptuous, and the ignorant. As a practitioner, he was acute, far-seeing, bold, and successful. He bowed to the lady and gentleman, touched the small wrist of his patient with an experienced finger, looked down upon the inquiring eyes, then accepted the seat which an attendant placed for him, and watched the pale face in silence. While making this mute inquiry, other eyes questioned *him*, and looked for any change his countenance might express. Minutes elapsed, and the doctor remained immovable. He was mentally analyzing the case—searching for an outward clue to guide him to an inward cause. The face of the girl, white as a pearl, did not for an instant turn from him. He strove to read the meaning of those uplifted eyes that seemed to ask so much at a single glance. There was pain, anxiety, earnestness, entreaty, and strange curiosity, mingled with terror, in those fixed orbs. She breathed with more difficulty, and moaned. Doctor Merigny's hand went to her wrist again; the pulse was small and fluctuating, now flying rapidly along its secret channels, now intermitting and receding upon the vital organs.

"What is your opinion, doctor?" asked the lady, in a low and anxious tone. It was the same magnetic voice Merigny had heard while waiting in the reception-room. There had been no introduction upon his *entrée* to the sick chamber; but he remembered the name De Villanville, and came directly to the conclusion that he was in the presence of Monsieur and Madame De Villanville.

"Madame," replied the doctor, "I have formed no opinion. One cannot pronounce on a case like this in a moment."

"Poor Catholina!" sighed Madame De Villanville.

"How long has she been ill?"

Merigny did not turn his uncommunicative face from the patient, in whose eyes he thought he detected a painful eagerness.

"Philip, how long has our dear girl been ill?"

"She has been sinking several weeks," was the quiet reply.

"The symptoms, madame?" continued the doctor.

"Ah! who can tell them better than I, who have watched her with all a parent's solicitude? At first, a slight headache, then a slight hectic, then a slight cough, and a gradual loss of vitality. Her appetite failed. She had seasons of dizziness, depression of spirits, an unnatural restlessness that banished sleep, and, to sum up all, *suffering*, with scarcely an intermission."

"Dr Merigny, this fair creature is our niece. You perceive in her not one life, but three: for madame and myself live in Catholina." A faint, troubled smile passed over the lips of the girl.

"Monsieur, I comprehend; your happiness fluctuates with the varying symptoms of this disease, and will be fatally wounded when this feeble frame burns out."

"Doctor! doctor! give me release from pain!" It was Catholina who spoke.

"You shall be relieved," said Merigny.

Both Monsieur and Madame De Villanville looked at him searchingly, his answer to Catholina was of such dubious meaning. Apparently unconscious that his expression was questioned, he produced his little case, dropped a grey powder into a small quantity of water, and administered it with his own hand.

"Everything," he said, "depends on the action of those few atoms of dust. You must permit me to sit by your niece until the crisis is past."

Madame pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You confide her treatment to me?" said Dr Paul.

"We do," replied madame.

"Then let me beg of you to retire. The presence of yourself and monsieur can but disturb the patient. I will sit by the bedside, observe such changes as may take place, and endeavour to obtain a deeper knowledge of this baffling disease." Madame and monsieur arose.

"The symptoms took such an alarming form to-night, that I had some fears that she had contracted the yellow-fever. The poor girl could not bear up under such a complication," observed the former.

"You need not dread such a contingency. The yellow pest is raging fiercely, but I believe has not laid its finger upon her. The lady will not die of fever."

"We rely upon your judgment, Dr Merigny," said Monsieur De Villanville. "Do all that human skill may do. Endeavour to conquer the insidious foe. We leave you in charge of our poor niece. Should any startling change occur—"

"I will announce the fact at once," interrupted the doctor; and with these words Monsieur and Madame De Villanville left the chamber softly.

CHAPTER III.

CATHOLINA.

"Give me air! give me air!" said Catholina.

Doctor Paul threw open a window, listened a moment to the receding footsteps, and returned to his seat.

"Ah! how grateful is this fresh breath from without!"—"Mademoiselle," said Merigny, "have you anything to say to me?"

"What should I say, doctor? My veins glow like fire. What is this that consumes me?"

"Can we converse without being heard?"

"Monsieur," she said, "if you would say that which you would not have heard, you must be very near me, and speak low. You fear to give them pain, but you need not scruple to tell me the worst. Ah! I know it already! I must die!"

"True!" answered Merigny. "Unless you trust me fully, you must die! Mademoiselle, look at me; study me well. When you have taken a little time to do this, say whether you will trust me?"

"I have confidence in your skill," she whispered.

"Do you know," asked Merigny, "what makes this fire in your veins, and kindles the wasting flame in your blood?" A little thrill of fear ran over Catholina. She did not answer.

"I can tell you," answered Doctor Paul. He put his lips to her ear, and whispered a word. She started up, shivered, looked wildly at him, and sank back upon the couch. "*Poison!*" whispered Merigny.

"*Poison!*" repeated Catholina. "It is a thought that has haunted me."

"It is simple truth. Be calm. You are dying of slow poison! You are being murdered piece-meal. This sudden prostration is caused by an overdose of the insidious agent. The hand that seeks your death became imprudently impatient."

"The motive, monsieur—the motive? Why should any one desire the death of a harmless young girl?"

"There are usually two incentives to crime; revenge and avarice. Monsieur De Villanville is your uncle; your father——"

"Alas, he is dead! The yellow pestilence, I am told, swept him away, with hundreds of other victims, so that I am now an orphan and an heiress."

"An orphan and an heiress! Here, then, is the motive. Mademoiselle, for heaven's sake, be brave! We will not speak the name of the assassins."

"This is terrible," she said, presently, "but something tells me that it is true. What shall I do?"

"Are you brave?" Merigny asked.

"If I am brave, sir, what then?" She looked at the doctor eagerly.

"I shall propose an expedient that will test all your courage, unless you prefer to have in the officers of justice and denounce your poisoners."

"I shrink from that, monsieur. They are powerful, they are rich. I dare not bring against them a charge so terrible. Proof might be wanting to sustain it."

"You must die, mademoiselle. You must pass an ordeal fearful in itself, rendered more so by the circumstances of the case. I have in this little case a drug so potent, that it will, when administered according to art, hold all the functions of life in abeyance. It will stop the laboured movements of your heart, and hush your respiration to the quietude of death."

"Go on, monsieur," whispered Catholina.

"All this," said the doctor, "shall happen before dawn."

"Well, I am dead, and Monsieur and Madame De Villanville are informed of my disease. What will then transpire?"

"Mademoiselle, say once more that you trust me?"

"I trust you! Should I survive the dread ordeal, and wake again to the realities of earth, what face may I expect to see?"

"Mine, mademoiselle. You will see *God* or *me*."

"But if there should be some error, and I awake to the fearful consciousness of being entombed alive?"

"That shall not occur. I will not lose sight of you."

"My life is with you; I am sure you know what the trust is. May God order the result. Give me the drug." The doctor stepped to the table, took a hand mirror from it, and held it before the peerless face of Catholina. He then drew a small vial from his pocket, moistened the tip of his finger with the contents, and touched the girl's face, neck, and arms in many places. "Now look at the mirror, mademoiselle. She obeyed, and closed her eyes in strong disgust; she was disfigured with sickly yellow spots.

"Ah! monsieur, you did not tell me; but now know all! I shall be carried away like those hundred that crowd the tombs. How frightful! I am ready."

Merigny rang a bell, and a servant answered him. "Inform Monsieur and Madame De Villanville that unmistakable symptoms of the plague have presented themselves in the case of Mademoiselle Catholina. Warn such of the inmates of this family as fear contagion to keep aloof. Good girl, look at mademoiselle."

The young woman glanced at Catholina, and hurried from the chamber. Doctor Paul prepared the drug Catholina swallowed the potion, and the doctor resumed his seat, and put up a silent prayer for the success of his hazardous experiment. The door was cautiously opened; he heard some one advance two or three steps very softly. Turning his head slightly, he beheld

Madame De Villanville; she was gazing at the spotted face of Catholina.

"I erred, madame," said Merigny. "*She will die of fever. She is dying now.*"

The lady's expression presented a singular anomaly; it exhibited wonder, terror, and something else.

"It is shocking! Poor darling! My dear doctor, will you, *dare* you, remain with her?"

"I dare, and I will; it is my duty. If I be not proof against the pest, it is already too late to avoid it. But you, madame, *you*—if you insist—"

"What, monsieur?" she interposed.

"I was about to say that if you insist upon taking my place, I will yield to your wishes."

"I implore you to remain!" she answered, shivering. "It is a dreadful visitation."

"It is, indeed; and I trust we shall be able to confine its ravages in this house to this chamber. Go at once, and leave all to me—even to the last details."

Merigny's voice fell almost to a whisper on the last words. "All is well!" said he. "Fear not, mademoiselle. I feel that you will pass in safety from this mansion. I have faith that you will baffle a horrible plot, and live to cover the criminals with shame and confusion. Ah! what a hypocrite has but now left us! Do you suffer, mademoiselle?"

"My blood is turned to ice, and throbs heavily through my veins. A leaden apathy weighs on my eyes. Monsieur, can this be death?"

"Let us hope death is far away in the future."

"If this dark sleep should not prove eternal, how long will it continue?"

"From ten to twenty hours,"

Her eyes quivered and closed again. A sad and nearly hopeless smile gleamed an instant on her pale lips, and she spoke no more. Merigny watched the change that gradually came over her with intense interest. He looked at his watch; it was two o'clock. He waited fifteen minutes, and again rang the bell; it was not answered. He rang more imperatively, but no hurrying footstep responded. "They fear the pest!" said he. He left the chamber and made his way down stairs. All was silent. He found Monsieur and Madame De Villanville in the reception-room, who prudently arose and retired at his approach.

"It is over!" said the doctor.

"So soon!" exclaimed De Villanville. "Your prediction was wrong."

"This dire disease often lies masked in the system to break out with more violence from its concealment and end the case at once. Science is sometimes at fault. In this instance, I confess, I was taken by surprise," replied the doctor, gravely.

"This quite overwhelms me! It takes away my breath *Mon Dieu!* when will this scourge cease its ravages!"

"The evil," suggested Merigny, "ends not here. When this yellow plague enters one's doors, it seldom goes forth till it has desolated a household. Already your servants shun the chamber of your niece."

"I know what shall be done!" exclaimed Madame De Villanville. "The remains of Catholina must be removed, and the chamber closed. Doctor Merigny, we depend upon you. Do not forsake us in this alarming emergency."

"Madame, you ask something outside the duties of my profession, but I sympathize with your distress."

I will serve you. If you would not breathe an infected atmosphere, yonder fair clay must be consigned to its kindred dust as speedily as hands can accomplish the sad task. I know this haste will shock you, but the living must not fall sacrifices to the dead."

"Most true! most true!" sighed De Villanville. "Catholina has passed beyond mortal aid. Dr Merigny, I accept, most gladly and gratefully, your friendly services. But, first, you will give me a certificate of her death. You will find writing materials upon that table."

"It is well thought of," said Merigny. "Her name?"

"Catholina De Noyan." Dr Paul sat down and wrote:

"This may certify that Mademoiselle Catholina De Noyan, niece of Philip De Villanville, deceased on the 9th of May, at two o'clock A.M.

"PAUL MERIGNY, M.D.

"NEW ORLEANS, May 9th, 17—"

He read this aloud, then gave it to De Villanville, who glanced at the signature, and placed it in an *escritoire*.

"You have a tomb, monsieur?" said Merigny.

"I have; but, but—" He paused, looking alternately at madame and the doctor.

"Pardon me!" added the latter. "I should have remembered that the pestilence ought not to be shut up in your family vault to be let loose at some future time. Mother Earth only can extinguish contagion. Monsieur, I will mark the spot."

Doctor Merigny bowed and withdrew. No servant showed him out. The man who had been the doctor's conductor stood upon the steps, awaiting him. He dropped a heavy purse into Merigny's hand, who accepted it without reluctance. "The carriage waits, sir."

"Let me be driven at once to Dauphine Street. You need not trouble yourself to give me such an airing as

you did in bringing me here." The man had a lantern he held it so that the light fell on the doctor's face. "There are two more steps—be careful. Of what did mademoiselle die?"

Dr Merigny felt two blazing eyes upon him. "Of the plague," he answered, quietly.

"Of the plague! You will rise in the work, monsieur. Get in. How sudden! This pestilence is a terrible thing. One meets carts at every corner carrying away the dead."

"No one knows it better than I, who have seen the ravages. What is your name?"

"Pierre Lereau, monsieur. I am content, for I serve a very indulgent gentleman."

"We go at a slow pace, Pierre Lereau."

"'Tis that vexatious coachman!" Pierre opened a little slide in front, and cried: "Go along, you indolent fellow." The "indolent fellow cracked" his whip, and the horses started forward more briskly. They had gone but a short distance when there was a violent concussion, and the coach tipped upon one side. The horses stopped very obediently.

"What *now*?" demanded Pierre, angrily.

"Wheel off," answered the coachman.

"Why did you not see that it was well on before we started? We are in a thousand hurries, you villain!"

Merigny was annoyed. Time was very precious. He thought of the beautiful sleeper that he had just left. He opened the door and sprang out. Pierre hurled a volley of oaths at the coachman.

"I cannot wait. Trouble yourself no further concerning me. I shall walk."

It was about three o'clock. The night was as black

as at the beginning, but Merigny perceived at once that he was on the Levee. The great river was sweeping on at his left. He heard a low, prolonged whistle from the direction of the crippled carriage. The sound was so peculiar and unexpected, that Merigny was startled. He involuntarily stopped, but hearing nothing more, went on. He was thinking where he should go, and how he should manage the removal of Catholina, when some one darted upon him out of the darkness. He was violently assailed; a hand clutched his throat, a weapon glided through his garments, and his bosom felt the touch of cold steel gliding like a serpent in contact with his flesh. A consciousness of his trust made him strong. He recoiled, shook off the choking hand, and dashed his fist into the face of his assailant, who fell. The doctor threw himself upon him, and a short but deadly struggle took place upon the ground. The unknown assassin made desperate efforts to pierce him with his dagger, while the doctor held him to the earth. The latter was but too certain that it was a matter to be decided at once, and wresting the weapon from the man's grasp, buried it to the hilt in his breast. A hollow groan told the story of mortal pain. Merigny arose, weak and flurried from the conflict. The roaring of the river suggested what he should do. He seized the body and cast it from him into the Levee; there was a heavy, sullen plunge, and the momentarily interrupted current rolled on. Merigny stood listening to the rush of waters. The same mysterious, protracted whistle reached his ears. He answered it in a manner singularly identical. Presently he heard the crack of a whip and the rattle of wheels. Pierre Lereau was in motion again.

CHAPTER IV.

DOCTOR MERIGNY MAKES A FRIEND.

THE carriage approached, but turned into one of the various streets leading to the Levee, before it reached the spot where he was standing. Merigny was now greatly embarrassed. The recent incident had disconcerted his plans. His life had been attempted, and he doubted not but Pierre Lereau was an accomplice and abettor of the act. It might be more serious even than this; De Villanville himself was possibly the prime mover of the intended crime.

"Never was man so perplexed," he muttered. "I should have followed the carriage. No; that would have availed nothing. I promised to save her; I had rather die than fail. A horse and cart were worth their weight in gold!" Stimulated by such thoughts, Merigny hurried on. He proceeded but a short distance, when he heard some kind of a vehicle lumbering toward him. It proved to be a horse and cart, of a kind much in use when the plague prevailed. On the forward end of the cart, sitting on a board placed across, Dr Merigny discerned the figure of a man. "Stop a moment, my friend," said the doctor.

"Impossible! my business is urgent, and I am late," was the immediate answer.

"I care not. I require your services without the loss of a single instant of time. It is an affair of the first consequence, and you cannot too quickly comply with my wishes!"

"But, monsieur, I tell you I am no sexton. I am doing but a charitable act for a poor neighbour of mine, whose wife, poor fellow, died yesterday, while

he is spotted for death to-morrow. Nobody would bury her; so I procured this cart, and am going to do for him what some neighbourly hand may have to do for you and I, monsieur, perchance."

"Have you the body?"

"No; I am going for it. Don't hinder me."

"Were ten thousand bodies awaiting burial you should go with me! What are the dead to the living? Let them fester!—let them rot!" exclaimed the doctor, sternly, and leaped into the cart, and in doing so, hit his foot against something that sounded hollow. "Ah! what is that?" he involuntarily muttered.

"A coffin!" replied the driver. "It took my last dollar to buy it; but she was a good woman, and I hadn't the heart to put her into the ground without one."

"It speaks well for your humanity, and assures me that I could not have found a better man for my purpose. You shall not suffer loss. Drive to the Levee, and turn to the left. Life and death hang on our movements. What is your name?"—"Jean Louis."

"I remember you. I attended one of your children through a severe illness. I have had a strange adventure. I cannot make you acquainted with the details. Time presses, and these flying minutes are hours in importance. What have you beside the—the *box*?"

"A spade and a pick; my feet are on them to keep them from rattling."—"What is this bundle?"

"A pair of overalls and a blouse; I use them when I work, and as I am to dig I threw them into the cart."

"Stop! and let me put them on," said Merigny, eagerly. "A disguise is what I need. But this hat! what shall I do with this hat? They have seen it." Merigny leaped from the cart, crushed his hat, and

threw it into the river, hastily drew on the overalls and put on the blouse and cap. He then smeared his boots with mud, and soiled his hands and face with the same. Mounting the cart again, he resumed his seat, and took the pick and spade between his knees.

"This is marvellous!" muttered the bricklayer.

"How slow this wretched animal travels. Follow the Levee until I bid you stop. A body must be taken from a certain place as speedily as possible. If we are too late, one of the sweetest of the daughter of Mother Eve will, I fear, be buried alive."

"Heaven have mercy on us all!" exclaimed the bricklayer. "It is a fearful thing to be buried alive."

"Yes," said Merigny.

"And to *bury* one alive, too!" added Jean.

"What sound is that behind us?" asked Merigny.

"It is the rattling of a dead-cart. I hear them often that I know their peculiar rumble a long way off."

Merigny clutched Jean's arm convulsively. "Turn on—urge on!" he said. "I have a misgiving—I don't like that cart. How rapidly it comes!"

The bricklayer stimulated the poor hack with the whip; but its strength was not sufficient to cope with the rival beast behind, which came on at a swinging gait and overtook them. Merigny's heart sank within him. He imagined he could hear a carriage containing Pierre Lereau, preceded by this shadow of death rattling at their heels.

"Get out of the way there, you tortoise!" shouted a rough voice. Jean Louis dexterously kept his horse in the middle of the way, but the cart, despite his efforts, was driven up beside them at a gallop.

"How's business, neighbour? Carted away a good

ny of 'em, have ye? It's a jolly time for our trade, 't it?" hailed the faster cart.

'I've trundled 'em off by the scores," replied Merigny, disguising his voice. "It's a great time for brother; a merry time, indeed."

"Bravo! bravo!" was the response. "Where's De llanville's? There's a bit of clay down there to carried away."

"*Mon Dieu!* it hasn't got among that sort of people, is it? Well, it don't care for nobody, it would seem. Reclain will get broken as well as common ware. You will find your fare about a quarter of a mile now, on your left; you will know the house by its being bigger than any near it, and by the steps that led up to the door, you can't miss it." And the cart was shed by them. "Slacken your pace," said Merigny. "Do you hear anything behind?"—"No," said Jean. "Stop! this should be the place."

The doctor alighted from the cart; Jean Louis stopped the reins and followed. The bricklayer seized a massive metallic knocker, and clattered away furiously; then, perceiving that the door was not opened, pushed it open. A quadroon girl appeared in the hall with a waxen candle. Her teeth chattered at the sight of the men and their burden.

"Where is it?" asked Jean Louis, gruffly.

She flitted along the hall and up the stairs before them, keeping as far from them as possible. She entered, placed the candle upon the floor, a few yards from the dreaded chamber, and fled.

"Hasten! hasten!" whispered the doctor.

The bricklayer threw open the door. One glance assured Merigny that everything was as he had left it.

They placed the box beside the bed; they reverently lifted Catholina. Both trembled while they composed her person in the narrow receptacle. Doctor P with all his power of self-control, was terribly shaken by anxiety for the result. *Mon Dieu!* I hear rattle of wheels! Screw on the lid! Loosely—loose the air must not be excluded. That will do. . . the wheels again! Let us out of this accursed house!

They raised their precious burden, hurried from chamber, along the corridor, and down the stairs. While they were passing through the hall, they saw a tall, dark figure standing in an open door. "Fare you well, my poor child!" said a voice. Jean Louis shivered and came near dropping the coffin. The doctor grasped the reins, and Jean Louis seated himself upon the black box, to steady it. The vehicle rolled slowly from the mansion, in the direction they had sent the other cart, which they discovered standing at a door.

"It is the carrier that has given us so much uneasiness!" muttered Jean. "The fellow is knocking at a side-door, very much out of temper, I should judge, by the fierce impatience of his blows. He is on a street at the left. Turn into it; I will be with you in a moment." The bricklayer dismounted, and followed to the rival cart. He overtook Merigny before he was driven far.

"What have you done?" asked the latter.

"Taken a linch-pin from a wheel. See: here it is! He cannot go far before he gets a fall. There! he has started. Don't you hear him? In five minutes, if the wheel does not roll off before, he will be at the house we have left. What will happen, then, doctor?"

"I don't know," he answered, lashing the horse.

"Most likely we shall be followed. The fact of two carts coming for the body will naturally excite suspicion."

"If we are pursued and overtaken, shall you give up the body, Doctor Merigny?" asked Jean Louis.

"If I had a hundred lives, I would lose them all, rather than surrender it! I have made a solemn promise, and I'll keep it."

"Where are you going, monsieur?" inquired Jean.

"To your cottage, my friend."

"No—no! that cannot be. I cannot assist to carry the plague to my wife and children!"

"Do not fear; we carry no pestilence. You cannot forsake me in this extremity. You will not violate the pledges of our mystic brotherhood, of which the implements of your calling must daily remind you?"

"I am yours in life and death!" answered Jean.

"You shall rejoice for that resolution. Hark! I hear that ominous cart! We are pursued. He has been to De Villanville's; he has aroused suspicion; and here we are, dragging along like snails! The loss of the linch-pin has not crippled his movements!"

"The wheel is off at last!" cried the bricklayer.

"We shall escape him, yet. What is that before us?"

"'Tis another of those odious carts! Just from the hospital, I'll warrant."

The bricklayer whipped forward, and soon overtook the heavily-loaded conveyance. The pursuing cart came on at a furious rate. Merigny grasped his pistol and looked determined. His countenance suddenly brightened.

"A word with you, my friend!" he cried, hailing the driver of the vehicle before him.

"Let's hear that word," was the careless response.

"I want to exchange a box with you. A gold piece for your trouble."

"One box is as good's another for me; so give you gold piece, and take your choice. Drivin' bargain with the doctors, eh?"

The man stopped. The doctor sprang out, thrust a golden coin into his palm, and while he was examining it in the feeble light, Merigny seized the rough case of Catholina with nervous energy, and placed it upon the top of his dismal freight; then hurriedly selected a coffin of corresponding size, dragged it from the heap and thrust it into Jean Louis's cart.

"My busy fellow," said he, coarsely, "here's another gold piece to keep your tongue from mentioning trifling matter. A pretty good thing, isn't it, comrade?"

"Not bad; but money's plenty now-a-days. There be nobody left but us dead carriers, soon."

Merigny made no response. The hindmost cart now very near. The long leaps of the horse brought him within hailing distance, then to the side of the tardy wheels. "Hillo, you fellow! what kind o' work do you call this here? Do you make it a business to steal honest folks' fares?"

"I get all I can in the way of trade. That's the style o' doin' things. Sharp's the word. Go along, comrade, and don't bother," replied Merigny.

"I'll trouble ye for that 'ere box!" said the carrier.

"Take it and welcome!"

The carrier stepped from his cart into Jean's, muttering and grumbling, took possession of the coffin which, after considerable tugging, and very little from Merigny, he deposited in his vehicle.

"That was cleverly done," said Jean Louis. "(

riddance to the rascal!" The whip was again brought into requisition, and the morning light was breaking brightly when Doctor Paul arrived at the bricklayer's cottage with his strange freight.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE BRICKLAYER'S.

THE black box was carried into the cottage as quickly as possible. Suzanne saw this ominous burden cross the threshold with face aghast with wonder. She looked inquiringly at her husband, who said: "It is nothing to harm you, my dear. It is only the body of a poor girl."

"And what, Jean Louis, do you want of the body of a poor girl?"—"I don't know. *He* wished to bring her here, and so we brought her."

"What is he? You are confused, Jean; I see your conscious guilt. This creature is a body-snatcher. Starve, my husband, but do not enter into so horrid a traffic!" cried Suzanne.

"Peace, good woman," said the doctor, "I am not such a wretch. Look at me." Merigny threw off his cap. "I am doctor Merigny. I saved your child. Give me a room where I may take *this*."

"Where you may be with *that*! Oh, Dr Merigny, I fear that you have gone mad!"

"The room, woman, the room," added the doctor.

"I cannot deny you. You know not what it costs me. Sad days are these, doctor. We owe duties to the living as well as to the dead." Merigny and Jean hastily bore their burden after Suzanne, who threw up a window as soon as she entered the little apartment. The room was neat, though scantily furnished, with a bed in it, covered with clean linen.

"God bless you!" said the doctor. "Now leave me."

Suzanne went out, with a regretful, deprecating air. Merigny tore off the lid of the box, and with the aid of Louis placed Catholina on the bed.

"I must have the box for the use for which it was first designed. I must hurry with it to my poor neighbour, and return the horse and cart to its owner," said Jean.

"Go out; I will pass it to you through the window. It will spare questions from your wife," replied Merigny.

This was soon done; and the doctor heard the cart rolling away to perform its original mission. Merigny locked the door, and closed the shutters of the only window in the room. He then threw off the brick-layer's blouse and overalls, and washed the stains from his hands and face. With absorbing interest he turned his attention to Catholina. He raised the delicate hand and held it a moment between his; it was cold. He tried the wrist with his finger; there was no flutter of life in it. He pressed his ear to her heart; silence reigned there. Taking a tiny vial from his case, he put some drops upon her lips. At her nostrils he held a larger one, which emitted a strongly pungent odour. There was no stir of nerve or muscle, heart or breath. So Doctor Paul watched and waited. An hour was like a day in its weary length; but it passed, and another, and yet another, and there was no transformation of the apparently dead. He continued his efforts, hanging faithfully over the insensate form. He consulted his watch; it was mid-day; the doctor thought it should have been sunset. He looked at Catholina her countenance was still fixed in that awe-inspiring quietude. He paced to and fro. The shutter was gently opened, and a bottle of wine and a glass were

stealthily placed on the window-sill. It was the bricklayer's rough hand that performed this unobtrusive kindness. Merigny seized the bottle, poured a brimming glass, and drank with nervous haste. He was beginning to despair; he had not yet detected any evidence of vitality. A lighted taper appeared in the same manner as the wine. It was what he wanted; he held it to the marble face. Was there a little flush of colour in the cheeks, or did his hopes deceive him? He drew a small table to the bedside, placed the taper upon it, and seated himself in the same position he had occupied when Catholina fell asleep; now feeling for a thrill of the pulse, now applying moisture to her lips and gentle friction to the arms. There was a feeble flutter at the wrist! Merigny was faint with joy. The agony of suspense began to roll back. He placed his cheek near her lips, and felt the first ripples of respiration upon it. His usually firm hands shook with the intensity of his emotions. A sigh, a quiver of the chest; the heart beat time to the mysterious music of life! Silence was in the room; the taper dimly burned; the light beamed on them faint and soft. Catholina's eyes opened with a trembling of the lids and a tremour of her person.

"Mademoiselle," said Merigny, reverently. "I promised that you should see God or me. I have kept my word." Catholina could not speak, but she laid her hand in his, shuddered, and smiled again—a smile so full of thanks, yet so sad. He gave her a little wine; she swallowed it passively. He raised her, adjusted the pillows, and drew the blankets more closely around her. She accepted these attentions with child-like docility. Her eyes wandered around the room.

A doubt was evidently lifted from her mind. "You are not *there*," said the doctor. "It is right, you are safe."

"Thanks!" It was a simple word, but it had a silver sound. "How long?" she added.

"Twenty hours," answered Merigny.

"You have suffered?"

"The day has been long, mademoiselle. Despair and I have become acquainted to-day. But I beg of you not to think of me, nor of the past, nor of the future. Have but one thought, and let that be, you are safe! In a moment, one of your own sex will be with you. Her name is Suzanne; you can trust her as you may all that I shall allow to approach you. You must have rest—undisturbed repose."

"Monsieur, I am in your hands."

Merigny unlocked and opened the door, and at his call Suzanne, the bricklayer's wife, entered the room and having received full explanations from the doctor of the mysterious proceedings, she readily volunteered to become Catholina's nurse.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE TOO MANY.

"Who presumes to knock at my door in this manner exclaimed De Villanville.

"It is insolent!" said madame. "Fanny—Fanny The quadroon came. "'Tis another carrier, monsieur!"

"Another carrier!" repeated De Villanville.

"What does that mean?"

"Two for Catholina!" said madame.

"It is one too many," added monsieur.

"Go to the door, Philip, but do not venture too near the frightful creature."

De Villanville followed Fanny, who opened the outer door, and retreated. The former, standing at a prudent distance, demanded: "What means this disturbance? Is my house an inn?"

"Does De Villanville live here?" asked the author of the noise.—"Yes. Who sent you?" said monsieur.

"A man who rode in a carriage. Told me to drive fast as I could."

"A man who rode in a carriage!" repeated De Villanville. "Many people ride in a carriage. Did the carriage follow you?"

"It started, but got wrecked against a post. The driver was intoxicated, I think."

"This is singular! I cannot understand. One of your dismal trade has already been here, and the body is on its way to burial. Something has gone amiss. I wonder where Pierre is? Ah, he comes! I hear the sound of horses' feet. Wait a moment, carrier." Pierre Lereau soon flung himself from the back of a horse, and mounted the steps hastily. "How is this?" asked De Villanville. "How is what, monsieur?"

"A second cart has come for the remains of my poor niece."

"A second cart! How can that be; I ordered but one?"

"The very thing I wish to know. It is true that a carrier has been here, and the body removed. Was everything right in the north?" continued De Villanville, significantly.

"Perfectly. The river runs on swiftly to-night. I have had two mishaps; first, a wheel came off, which detained us some minutes, next, that villain Joseph dashed against a post, and disabled the carriage so that we had to leave it, and ride the horses back."

"You are sure there was no mistake—no blur—no change of purpose?"—"I have not a doubt."

"Then tell me why this fellow is here?"

"It is the very man I sent, monsieur."

"True! But who sent the other?"

"I wish I knew. It is perplexing!"

"Possibly he heard you giving directions to this man and hurried on before him, out of rivalry in business."

"That wasn't so, begging your honour's pardon; I'll wager a dozen fares that I overtook the thief as he came here. He directed me to the wrong place."

"Pierre—Pierre!" exclaimed de Villanville, anxiously. "You did not again see this scoundrel?"

"No; but I heard his cart coming slowly up a street."

"I dare not trust the dust of my poor niece to such hands. Pursue him, honest fellow, and take the body from him. Bury it carefully. Do not heap it in with the common herd; allow it a separate resting place. Place a little wooden cross over the spot, that you may afterward show it me. When this is done, come and receive your reward. Meantime, take this piece of gold to quicken your movements." De Villanville threw a coin at the carrier's feet, much as he would toss a bauble to a cur. Jude Schwartz hurried away, well pleased with his commission.

"You had better mount one of the horses, Pierre, and follow a short distance behind, to see if he is faithful or needs any assistance." Pierre left the house without delay, manifestly perplexed. Monsieur joined madame in her room. "Fanny," said the latter, "go up to our poor dear's chamber, open all the windows, lock the door, and bring me the key."

"I cannot!" replied Fanny.

"Why can you not?" asked her mistress, sharply.

"I am afraid of the plague. If I breath these three times, I am sure I should have it, and die."

"What right have you to fear?" began madame. Silly thing! You cannot die till your time comes."

"I will not go! I had rather jump into the river!" Fanny ran to join her fellow-servants, and talk about the fever and mademoiselle.

"You see, Philip, that there is a panic in the house. Every one thinks of his or her life. Come! let us serve ourselves; let us show more courage than these menials."—"Excuse me Leonora."

"You a coward, too? Look at this hand. Observe how much smaller it is than yours. Take hold of it. Does it tremble? Yours is hot and nervous. Come, Philip; do not let a woman shame you."

The pair stood in the now shunned chamber; there was a medicinal smell in it, and a vacancy and stillness there to make one shudder.

"Poor soul! poor soul!" said Leonora, and raised the windows. "Richer than we, perhaps," said De Villanville. "Don't drive, Philip."

"One is not iron, Leonora. This affects even you; you cannot disguise your secret terror. Do not touch those garments; death may be in them."

Madame dropped the article she held; she looked at him steadily, but *he* gazed moodily at the vacant bed. Madame breathed hard a moment, and mechanically opened a little drawer in the table by the bedside. "It is gone," she exclaimed.

"What is gone?"

"A chain and picture; *his* picture. There were symbolical characters on the reverse of it. Perhaps he

belonged to a secret order. You had better have cast it into the fire, Philip."

"Leonora, I could swear that I heard that accurs trowel again," murmured De Villanville.

"For heaven's sake!" she whispered, "never speak of that trowel again. Turn your thoughts on something more cheerful. Think of our son—think of our Raymond, who will be with us in a few days, or even hours. We shall find him a fine, handsome fellow. Raymond will be rich, Philip—very rich. Hark! hear a step in the hall. It is quick and eager; it is *his* step; no other would be so joyful," interposed madame, and was hastening forward, when De Villanville stopped her.

"Pause, Leonora. Reflect upon our situation; our son finds us plunged in grief and affliction; we meet him with subdued gladness. Tears of sadness mingle with our greetings; he will ask: 'Where is my cousin?'"

"Have I not shown myself the stronger of the two? Do you distrust me, now?" She threw off De Villanville's hand, and flew down the stairs. An elegant young man met her in the hall, and received her in his outstretched arms. She kissed him, and pushed him from her, and looked at him. "Ah! Philip, how tall and comely he has grown."

"Raymond," said De Villanville, "welcome home."

"I thought to take you by surprise; but I find you up, and apparently waiting my coming. Where is Catholina? Sleeping, I suppose?"

"Yes," said madame, "Catholina is sleeping!"

"Let the pretty dreamer be called at once. I cannot wait till the usual hour of rising. I have heard that she is a marvel of perfection," added Raymond.

"So perfect that she has been deemed worthy of the companionship of angels."

"Mother! what mean these sighs, these downcast looks, those tears?"

"Catholina is dead!"

"Dead!" repeated the young man, aghast.

"*The plague!*" said Madame De Villanville.

"When was this?"

"At two of the clock this morning."

"Thank God, I shall see her body," said Raymond.

"My son," said De Villanville, "the stern hand of necessity is upon us; she is buried."

"Such haste is shocking," exclaimed the young man.

"It adds to the bitterness of bereavement," answered Madame. "You have returned in an evil hour. Had there been time between the announcement of your visit and the designated day of starting, we should have warned you to remain. Friends are hurried out of sight as soon as they cease to breathe."

"This news destroys the pleasure of return. If I could see her," said Raymond, thoughtfully.

"Do not dwell upon the subject," whispered his mother. "It has already affected your father's mind."

"But I must, I *will* see her," muttered the young man.

"Sit here, Raymond, where we can see you in the full light," said De Villanville. "We want to mark every change that a four years' absence has made. How your pin flashes. Of what quaint device is it?"

"A strange device truly," answered Raymond, with a faint smile. "It is a golden trowel set in diamonds."

"A damnable device!" cried De Villanville, fiercely.

"Philip, your father has a horror of artizans and vulgar taste," she continued. "But it is a beautiful

thing, I confess—the workmanship is fine, and the setting exquisite. Look, Philip.”

“Yes, I see; it is very elaborate,” said De Villanville. “But I hate mechanical symbols.”

“I’ll remove it,” said Raymond.

“By no means,” returned the other, cheerfully. Forgive the passing whim. Remember what a shock I have received.”

“You must have rest,” responded madame, with soothing quietness. Raymond, you, too, need rest. I have prepared a room for you far from that fatal chamber. The servants shall tread on tip-toe while you sleep.”

“You are too careful of me, mother. College life is not the most quiet existence. I am used to noise; I could sleep if a hundred bricklayers were plying their trade with but a wall between us,” said Raymond, carelessly. The conversation stopped here, and the young man retired.

CHAPTER VII.

RAYMOND GOES TO DAUPHINE STREET.

It was four o’clock on the afternoon of the same day. Raymond joined his mother in her dressing-room. She was reclining upon a couch, in graceful *deshabille*. “Mother,” he said, with a languid smile, “you are still young and handsome. But why do you press your hand to your heart? What means this odour of salts? Are you ill, mother?”

“You remember those headaches, Raymond? Horrid things; they yet afflict me. Constitutional, I suppose. Please reach me the vinaigrette.”

“You must have a physician. What doctor do you employ? I will go for him at once.”

"Doctor Merigny; a young man, but with the reputation of great skill," responded the lady.

"Where is he to be found?"

"At Dauphine Street. But you need not go: I will send Pierre. The fever rages so, I dare not trust you out. Poor Catholina fell an easy victim, because she was not acclimated."

"No one can serve my mother so well and so speedily as I. I have no fear of the contagion. Those that are not afraid do not die."

"Well, my son, Joseph shall drive you there. Do not stay long, for the sight of you does me more good than a score of doctors." The young man went to give the requisite order to Joseph, and somewhat to his surprise found him at the door with a carriage. He leaped into it, and in a very short time he was at his destination. The door was quickly opened, when a young girl, with a Grecian face, stood before him. Expecting to see a servant or the doctor himself, Raymond was somewhat disconcerted; nor could he entirely conceal his embarrassment from the clear, calm eyes that rested inquiringly upon him. "I have come for the doctor," faltered Raymond.

"He is absent."

"Will he return soon, mademoiselle?"

"I do not know."

"May I ask if he has been long gone?"

"A very, very long time, monsieur. He was called up last night, between the hours of twelve and one, in the most urgent manner. I have not seen him since. I am greatly disturbed at his unusual absence. My brother Paul makes brief visits."

"Seventeen hours!" said Raymond, reflectively.

"If nothing unfortunate has happened, he will undoubtedly return soon. With your permission, mademoiselle, I will sit awhile in his office."

"As you please, monsieur."

She quietly conducted Raymond to Merigny's office, where he waited an hour patiently. He was reluctantly leaving, when the girl returned.

"Mademoiselle," said Raymond, "will you describe the circumstances under which the doctor left?"

"Willingly. A carriage came, monsieur; I heard it rattle to the door in haste. The bell rang loudly and long. Doctor Paul arose, opened a window, and wished to know what was wanted. The person who replied was too imperative to please my brother; he threatened and entreated. I looked out, but it was too dark to discern more than dim outlines of a carriage and horses. The doctor yielded, and was driven away; since which time I have received no tidings of him."

"It is extraordinary! Did you gather from the conversation what the case was?"

"It was not the plague—so said the messenger. But what assurance have I that he told the truth? My fears conjure up a thousand horrors."

Raymond would further have expressed his interest had he not deemed it prudent to forbear. Bowing low, and quite bewildered by the sister of Doctor Paul, he returned to the carriage.

"Where shall I drive to, monsieur?" Joseph asked.

The young man gave him directions, then settled back among the cushions with a sigh for Catholina, and a hope for her he had just parted from.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESPIONAGE.

RAYMOND had first intended to be driven to various parts of the city to make inquiries concerning Merigny, but changed his purpose and returned directly home.

"What success?" asked Madame de Villanville.

"The doctor was not at home, and, what is very singular, has been absent some eighteen hours."

"Unfortunate!" she observed. "Eighteen hours is a long time for a physician to be away from his office, when there are, doubtless, crowds at his door demanding his services."

"It is extraordinary!" said Raymond.

"His absence will not appear so remarkable," answered De Villanville, "if you reflect that the plague is abroad. He has probably joined the solemn procession of his patients. Many that walked the ground yesterday are beneath it to-night."

"His sister is much alarmed."

"Sister!" repeated his father.

"Yes, a young and lovely creature," replied Raymond.

"Many sisters are bereaved. The sallow destroyer is no respecter of persons," said madame. "Think of Catholina," she added, sighing.

"I *have* thought—I *do* think of her!" exclaimed her son. "The idea of her sudden death and hurried burial haunts me like a ghost. How is your head, mother? You are pale; it still aches. I am going out to search for Doctor Merigny."

"You need not; I assure you I am better. It is grief and consternation that make my brow throb."

"If you really feel better, mother, I will retire to my room, for I confess I have slept little since my

return. To-morrow morning I trust you will see me refreshed and cheerful."

"Now you talk like people of sense," remarked monsieur. "Take care of yourself, my son, for you have much to live for. When this panic is over, you shall spend a great deal of money. . You will be rich, Raymond—very rich!"

De Villanville struck his hands together and arose from his seat; he stood a moment in a sombre ecstasy of triumph, then dropped back into his chair as if suddenly withered by remorse or terror. "Accursed sound!" he muttered. "Will it never cease?"

"He loved the poor child so tenderly!" murmured madame. "Go, my son, go. The sight of you revives too vividly the remembrance of his loss in Catholina."

Raymond left them, with conflicting emotions swaying to and fro within him. He could not tell why he felt relieved when he was alone, with their questioning looks upon him. The air of his room was close and suffocating. It appeared to him that he could not respire it with safety. He opened a window and put forth his head, that the cool atmosphere might fan his face. "I will fulfil my promise to Mademoiselle Merigny." He remembered his mother's warning respecting the pestilence, and added: "Those live longest who fear the least. Besides, there is no immunity of place; death creeps alike into hovels and mansions. I will go out; I will inquire for the doctor; afterward, I will hasten to Mademoiselle Merigny."

Making some changes in his dress, and arming himself, he stealthily left the house. He had reached the street, when, to his annoyance, he met Pierre Lereau; a person to whom he had already taken a dislike.

"Will you ride, Monsieur Raymond? Monsieur knows that everything is at his disposal."

"Very true," answered Raymond. "No one is better aware of the fact than myself, but I prefer my feet to-night."—"Keep the plague in mind, monsieur!"

"I have no fear. Inform no one that I am not in my room."

It was not very late; but a cloud charged with rain hung over the city. A fine, watery mist floated in the air, which soon began to fall slowly in drops. Raymond paused at the first corner, to learn if he was followed by Pierre. He waited but a moment before seeing a man stealing after him, whom he had no difficulty in recognizing. When he was opposite the corner, the young man stepped forth and confronted him, much to his embarrassment.

"You were following me," said Raymond sternly.

"Yes, I confess it. Ah, sir, do not expose yourself to the contagion. You are young, and have much to live for." Pierre spoke in a voice of friendly yet earnest remonstrance. Raymond was not so much touched by his devotion as Pierre thought he ought to be.

"I do not pretend to fathom motives," the young man replied, "but I know that your watching cannot keep away the plague."

"True, monsieur, but there is such a virtue as prudence, you know."

"Go back; you have already detained me too long."

"Yes, I will go—I am going. But be careful, Raymond—be careful!"

Pierre's voice had a singularly warning sound, which rang in the young man's ears long after he had left him, perplexing him not a little.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CARRIER.

As Raymond De Villanville pursued his way he could not help reflecting on what had just occurred. The deportment of Pierre also made some impression on his mind; but other thoughts came to obliterate it for the time being. He went to various quarters where the fever was raging, and made inquiries for Merigny. He found some who knew the doctor, and a few who had seen him two or three days since in attendance upon the sick; but not one who could give a more recent account of him. He called at various police stations, but with no better success. He at length came upon a man standing beneath a dim street-lamp, with a heavy cart whip in his hand. He whistled, cracked his whip, and sung snatches of street songs. Conquering to some extent his aversion, the young man accosted him. "You are a carrier?" said Raymond, involuntarily.

"At your honour's sarvice. Give me the name, street, and number, and I'll be there in a twinklin'. Lively times these be, and we have to work fast to keep up with the business. Haven't slept much for two or three nights, there's been so many waitin' for their last ride."

Raymond regarded the man with silent aversion. "Don't you fear the fever?" he asked.

"Fear the fever! What does it want of a poor devil like me? Hasn't it got better flesh to feed on? Ha, ha! Little the plague cares for Jude Schwartz, and little Jude Schwartz cares for the plague."

"Have you buried a young woman lately?" Raymond asked, impulsively.

"Heaps on 'em—heaps on 'em!" exclaimed Schwartz,

lifting himself and striking the ground with his whip.
"A young woman, indeed!"

"Your indifference shocks me. I refer to a beautiful young lady who was carried away at about two o'clock this morning."

"I carried away ten last night, but saw the face of no beautiful young lady. All I looked at were spotted with the yellow death."

"Did you go to Villanville's?"

"Now you come to the p'int, young man. When folks talk plain, I can understand 'em."

"Here—catch this."

Raymond tossed the carrier a piece of money; he caught it dexterously, shook it a few seconds in his palm, then dropped it into a canvas bag which he concealed in the lining of his blouse.

"You *did* go to De Villanville's?" said Raymond, impatiently.

"A large, Frenchy-lookin' house near the river! Yes, I rattled down there in a great hurry. Vexation enough I had in findin' the place, bein' misdirected by dishonest fellers that hadn't no right to be in the trade."

"Do not stop, man, to tell me the details," interposed Raymond. "Inform me at once whether you took a body from that house?"

"Well, I suppose that I may say I did; for the long and short of it amounts jest to that. Want me to go again, eh? My cart's jest round the corner, and I'll be down there in no time almost."

"Be silent and listen to me!" said Raymond, with sternness. "Can you find the spot where you buried her?"

"Don't be fiery," replied Jude, drawing circles in the

air with his whip. "I was told to mark the spot, and I did. I can go to it in the darkest night."

"Get your tools and conduct me to the spot," he said, arousing himself.

"Another to put in, eh? I'm not much in the diggin' line, you see. You'll find poor devils enough on the ground, who makes a business of it."

"You shall be paid. Get a spade and come along."

"Jest as your honour likes. Am allers willin' to 'commodate a gentleman as pays."

"Lead the way," said Raymond. A few moments later found him seated beside Jude Schwartz, upon the dead cart, moving with tolerable speed toward the fields fast filling with the victims of the pestilence.

CHAPTER X.

EXHUMATION.

RAYMOND felt the motion of the cart, but scarcely realised where he was going, or what he intended to do. A strong desire to see Catholina possessed him. It seemed impossible that death could destroy her marvellous beauty. That face would retain its loveliness in defiance of disease and mortality. This was the purport of his flying thoughts, as he jolted toward the stranger's burying place behind the city.

"Here we are," said Jude Schwartz, as they reached the place where many were working among the dead. "Isn't it a lively sight?"

"Have you a lantern?"

"Yes, your honour; and I'll go and light it."

The carrier jumped from his cart; and, running to the nearest light, came back with his lantern burning. "Now, monsieur," he added, "I'll show you where I

put the box. I didn't dump it in with the others in the trench, but gave it a separate bit of earth, 'cordin' to orders. Here's the little wooden cross that I's told to put down, so's there'd be no mistake."

Schwartz held the lantern over a fresh heap of earth, at which Raymond looked with awe and grief, while memory was painfully busy within him, recalling Catholina as he had seen her, and as it seemed to him she then ought to be. "Dig!" he said.

"What does the gen'leman say?" asked Schwartz.

"Faster—faster."

"Look here," said Schwartz, brushing the perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand. "Ain't I workin' as fast as a cove can? Be patient, won't ye?"

"What was that hollow sound?" exclaimed Raymond. "The spade hit the box."

"So soon? Such a burial is a mockery, man."

"It's better than we does for many of 'em. Here are eighteen good inches of dirt, which is uncommon. We can't talk about six feet in fever times. There! What shall I do now, young gen'leman? The box is as bare as a picked bone."

"Take the lantern. Where's the pick?"

Jude Schwartz carelessly threw his spade on the ground, and mechanically took the lantern.

"Give me the pick, fellow. Hold the light this way, and be steady. Don't speak; I don't wish to hear you."

Raymond stepped into the shallow grave, upon the coffin. The head of the lid opened on hinges. He struck the point of the pick carefully beneath it, and wrenched it open. His whole frame shook as it yielded to his strength; in an instant he would see the face of Catholina! He motioned to Schwartz to depress the

lantern. He obeyed, and Raymond beheld, not the features of Catholina, but a bearded, distorted face horrible in its repulsiveness. "Villain!" he cried, seizing Jude Schwartz by the throat, "you have deceived me."

"For God's sake, monsieur, don't choke a poor devil who has done you no harm."

"Fellow! this is not Catholina De Noyan. Who is she? What fiend possessed you to play me a trick like this?" he continued, fiercely, nearly shaking the life from Jude Schwartz.

"Heaven is my witness, that this is the body buried from De Villanville's."

"'Twas a young girl, knave."

"Can't help it, monsieur; but this is what I got and there's the cross I put over it. If your worst 'll only hear me, I'll tell you all about it."

Impressed by the apparent sincerity of Schwartz, Raymond bade him go on, and tell the truth. The carrier related minutely and intelligibly the manner in which he had procured the body, to the surprise and bewilderment of the young man.

"Two carts?" he said, vaguely.

"Two of 'em," reiterated Jude.

"And you overtook the first one, and got this. He pointed, with loathing, to the grave.

"I did, monsieur—I did."

"How am I to believe this incomprehensible story?" "I don't know, monsieur—I don't know. But you may ask De Villanville, and he will tell you that the first carrier came, and the first one got the body, and that he ordered me to pursue and claim it. I did so with right good will, for carrier number one had deceived me. I heard the rumbling of a cart, :

thinkin' it might be the right one, turned in that direction. A wheel came off; fixed it up, and went on again, and came up with cart number one, which was drawn by a jaded horse. I claimed the box, and they give it up."

Raymond stood a long time without speaking. "There has been a painful error somewhere."

"Not on my part, monsieur. I'm a poor carrier, but I can tell the truth as well's another. If you are still in doubt, go to De Villanville, and he will tell you about the two carriers and the wooden cross. I saw his man after it was done. He said to me, 'You are sure, fellow, that you have done as you were told?' I said, 'Yes,' he looked at me a minute, and added, 'You can go, and forget all about it.'"

"Throw back the earth," said Raymond, presently, "and place the cross in its original position. Say nothing of this to any one. I shall see you again."

Raymond went away like one in a troubled dream, and the sound of the falling clods followed him.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT HAPPENED AT MERIGNY'S.

RAYMOND found his way to Dauphine Street more perplexed than he had ever before been. He felt himself entirely unable, with the knowledge he then possessed, to solve the mystery. If Jude Schwartz had not grossly deceived him, there was something concerning the affair quite inexplicable. The thought occurred, that if he could find the first carrier, he might obtain some light in regard to the subject; and he resolved to do so long before he reached Merigny's. It was past mid-

night when he rang the doctor's bell. Mademoiselle Merigny opened the door herself. She was paler than before, but seemed glad to see him.

"Monsieur," she said, "your countenance is not the harbinger of good tidings."

"Mademoiselle," answered Raymond, whose heart beat faster at the sight of her, "I have heard nothing of your brother. I have inquired for him in various quarters of the city, without success."

"Come in, monsieur. You are kind to think of others, when selfishness, fear, and grief fill every heart. Her voice was low and sad. Raymond followed her into a small, neatly-arranged apartment, and became seated. "I have called at the police-stations, and visited the sections where the fever is raging; I regret to say that my inquiries excited but little attention. As you have observed, mademoiselle, all are lost in the thought of themselves. But you must not despair. I yet hope to be the bearer of better news."

"Your garments are soiled with earth," she said. "Have you sought him among the dead?" The young man looked at himself, and saw blotches of clay upon his clothes. "Perhaps," she continued, "you have buried him, and conceal it from me." She advanced a step, and regarded him imploringly. He shuddered, and his countenance assumed a deeper pallor, while his head sank upon the high back of his chair.

"You are ill—you are faint!" She hastened to pour a glass of water, which he received with an unsteady hand. The bell rang gently while the gentleman was at his lips. It was not a peremptory and urgent summons, but timid and hesitating.

"Thanks!" said Raymond, returning the glass. "I

not think of me. I am very well. "It is exhaustion only. See! I am strong again." He arose, smiling, "I will answer that summons, if it be your pleasure."

Mademoiselle Merigny bowed assent, but looked doubtfully at Raymond, who stepped into a hall where a lamp was burning, and opened the street door. A momentary silence ensued.

"Doctor Merigny?"

"Not at home," replied Raymond.

"I'll wait for him," added the inquirer.

The young man closed the door, and perceived before him a person in overalls and blouse, with a paper cap on his head. His coarse garments were plentifully besprinkled with mortar, and burned yellow in various places with lime. "My good man, Mademoiselle Merigny, his sister, fears that he may not return to-night."

"And *you*"—began the bricklayer, hurriedly, and immediately stopping with manifest embarrassment, "Are you a doctor?"

"Unfortunately, no. I am simply what you see me. For your sake, if you are in need, I heartily wish I had the skill of Doctor Merigny."

The bricklayer's eyes rested on the diamond trowel. "I thank you, monsieur," he answered, in a more humble tone, touching his cap. "You look like one who would willingly spread the cement of brotherly love. Would you be so good as to give me a word with Mademoiselle Merigny?"

"My worthy friend, she is not in a state of mind to see strangers. Her brother has disappeared. I have sought him vainly. Her anxiety is on his account. There—you know all. Good-night."

"I will not leave the house till I have seen her."

The bricklayer turned from the young man, and walked quickly into the doctor's office. Mademoiselle was already there. She heard his voice, and ran toward him with outstretched hands, crying: "Paul Paul!" She stopped suddenly when she saw a man in overalls, blouse, and paper cap. He made a hurried deprecating gesture. "You cannot deceive me. You are alive—you are well! I see—hear you!"

Faint with joy, she sprang forward, and the man in the blouse caught her in his arms.

"Ah, Edna! could you not practise deception one moment? We are not alone, and I have much to say."

"Oh Paul! Paul, what miserable hours you have made me! But you are here, and I am happy."

"My Edna!" said the doctor, soothingly. "What gentleman is this, dear?"

"This is monsieur—monsieur—"

"Raymond," added the young man.

"Yes, Monsieur Raymond," she repeated, "who has been kind enough to search for you in various parts of the city. Whatever motives you can have for this disguise, I am sure you have nothing to fear from him."

"This is unfortunate. I intended that no eyes but yours should behold me. I have the most imperative reasons for secrecy. Sister, will you leave me with Monsieur Raymond?"

Edna left the room, saying, "Do not keep me long away from you, Paul."

The doctor closed the doors carefully, and bolted them. "Give me your hand, Monsieur Raymond. They interlocked their hands in a peculiar manner. They bent toward each other, as if to embrace. Some

thing was whispered, but in a breath so low that it died within the circumference of the ear.

"By the mallet and the chisel!"

"By the square and the compass!"

"Swear to me!"—"By what shall I swear?"

"By the three great lights of our mystic brotherhood!"

"To any oath that an honourable man may bind himself, I cheerfully submit, if thereby I can serve a brother who stands within the sacred circle of our immemorial order," answered Raymond.

"You swear, by the three great lights of our inviolable brotherhood, that you will reveal to no one, without my free consent, that you have seen me to-night, or have any knowledge of my existence, whatever inquiries may be made, or whatever may result from the concealment of the fact of my being alive?"

"Stop one moment!"

"What would you have?"

"Take off that cap, and let me see your face."

Doctor Paul threw off the bricklayer's cap, revealing a forehead broad, clear, and crowned with clustering black hair. His dark eyes were calm and steady, beaming, Raymond thought, with a noble purpose. "You are Doctor Paul Merigny? Your countenance is like *hers*—I am content. I solemnly pledge myself to that which you have asked. You are dead to me till your word unseals my lips and my eyes."

"Neither by word, look, inuendo, gesture, nor insinuation will you endanger my secret?"

"By neither of these," answered Raymond.

"Monsieur, you greatly oblige me. Believe me, it is no common motive that induces me to ask so extraordinary a thing of a stranger."

There was a gentle tap at the door. "Have you not been long enough with Monsier Raymond?" asked Edna. "Let me in, Paul—let me in!"

"Yes, Edna," said the doctor, admitting her.

Raymond could not help envying Paul Merigny. Feeling that he was no longer needed, he arose to go.

"Monsieur Raymond, you will not have the heart to take Doctor Paul away?" said Edna.

"No, mademoiselle; the case is terminated, and his skill no longer required. I congratulate you on his safety," answered the young man.

Doctor Merigny now turned his practical eye critically upon Raymond. "My friend," he said, "go home and go to sleep. Your energies have recently been too much taxed. I know the meaning of the pale line around the mouth, that unsteady turning of the eyes, and the slight tremour of your hands."

"You are right. My nerves are overstrained. It has been many hours since I have slept. I trust I may meet again. Good-night, mademoiselle."

CHAPTER XII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

PAUL, we are alone. Tell me what has happened, and the meaning of this disguise. I am sure something singular has transpired. My instincts assure me that our whole lives are about to be changed. I know what the deeper currents of your nature are stirred."

"You are not deceived in your feelings," answered Merigny; "I have the strangest tale to tell you!"

"I knew it!" murmured Edna. "But if no one comes between us, I care not, so you are safe!"

"It is by the mercy of God that I am with you. But listen, and you shall hear all."

Doctor Paul began at the beginning, and told his story with remarkable minuteness and fidelity. Edna did not withdraw her eyes from him during his narration.

"This is wonderful," she said. "Your life has been attempted, and you are considered dead!"

"Yes."

"And you saved her? Catholina! It is a pretty name. But I shall hate her! Do not frown. Why should I not hate her who robs me of you? You have betrayed me, Judas. You said she was fair?"

"I know of but one who bears any comparison to Catholina."—"Then love that *one*. She will be to you more than sweetheart or wife. Paul, I wish this Catholina had slept on and never awakened. You must never see her again."

"Be just, Edna; you are the soul of truth and loyalty."

"Then be content with me, Paul," she replied.

"You will soon love this fair creature, Edna."

"Never! never!" She compressed her lips, looked defiantly at her brother, and said: "I am her enemy already."

"You disappoint me," answered Merigny, sorrowfully. "I had hoped for your co-operation. As you have said, our lives are to change. Henceforth there is to be no Doctor Paul Merigny in New Orleans."

"Judas, look at me!" cried Edna, contracting her brows. "Why do you not denounce these wretches, and give them up to justice? I will tell you why, traitor! You love this Catholina, and would not for the world surrender the privilege of taking care of her."

This mystery pleases you. At heart, too, you are revengeful, and wish to bring upon the perpetrators of this unnatural villainy a slow and crushing punishment.

"You refuse to go with me, darling?"

Paul looked at Edna imploringly. "You mistake me, brother; I *will* go with you; I *will* be your instrument, reserving only to myself the privilege of hating her who comes to rival me in your affections."

"Good sister! I am sure of you. Hate Catholics you cannot."

"Paul, I have told you what will happen," she cried, warningly. "Your conduct has been noble far. Do not be troubled about my acquiescence in your plans. But where are we to go? What do you expect of me?"

"I shall entrust Catholina to your care."

"That is foolhardy, indeed. Dare you give me your doll to dress and undress and rock to sleep? You would make me do something wicked."

"Sister," exclaimed Paul, kissing her white forehead, "you cannot be wicked; it is impossible."

"One does not know her strength till she is tried. Do not tempt me too much, Paul. This house is to be shut up; I see it in your face. We are to live somewhere, with no names, and the fame of Merigny is to go out like a candle. Next comes a chapter of romance, intrigue, mystery, crime. But give me your hand, brother—I will walk this new path with you."

She smiled, and stretched out her hand. Paul pressed it to his lips, and called her pet names. They were never more devoted to each other than at that moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE MYSTERY.

RAYMOND wended his way to the corner where he had first found Jude Schwartz. The young man waited till he came, when he proceeded to make minute inquiries respecting carrier number one, from whom he had taken the box. "There were two of them," replied Jude. "They drove a high-boned, low-spirited horse, which crept over the ground like a lazy snail." "There were two men in the cart! Very well; describe them."

"I hadn't much time to be particular about their looks. The one that helped me move the box, however, wore a blouse and overalls. I should say, mon-sieur, that he looked more like a bricklayer than a carrier or grave-digger. The fellow that was driving was taller and slimmer, and said nothin'."

"It is necessary that you should find these men. Seek them everywhere; leave no part of the city unsearched. You shall suffer no loss. If successful, your reward shall be above your expectations."

"Perhaps, your honour," suggested Jude, "the whole thing was a cheat, and the young woman didn't lie at all. There was some hocus-pocus, I'll warrant. They was wicked-lookin' ones that I see, as I stood on the steps."

"How many did you see?" asked Raymond.

"Two—one a stern-faced, gloomy gentleman, while the other was the same who ordered me to go there. Both 'peared surprised because number one had stole march on me. They doubted whether it was all right."

"The mystery increases," muttered Raymond.

"They's in a mighty hurry to git her out o' t house."

"It was unnatural!" exclaimed Raymond.

"I see him! I see him," cried Schwartz, sudden darting away, and running down a dark street with his speed. Raymond followed him, and, by straining every muscle, got near enough to see that he was pursuing a man in a blouse. Not doubting but that was the carrier he desired so much to find, he joined zealously in the race, plunging to the right and left with a swiftness that was quite astonishing. Once or twice he was near enough to the fugitive to hear him pant; but presently lost sight of him, and reluctantly abandoned the chase. Vexed and disappointed, turned his face toward home. It was nearly day-light. In the reception-room he found a wax-taper, which he lighted, and stopped to rest a moment, before ascending to his chamber. As it happened, he took a package by an escritoire, a drawer of which was open. A package of papers met his eyes, which he mechanically raised and looked at. A paper slipped out. On its characters upon it were recently traced; it was a certificate of Catholina's death, given by Doctor P. Merigny. Raymond perused the writing in silent wonder. The first thing that forced itself upon him was, that his cousin had been attended by Dr Merigny, the man he had so recently left. The next was, that the time of the doctor's midnight call corresponded to what had been represented as the closing period of Catholina's life. Here were two distinct circumstances which were not without meaning. Again, the simple truth, that the deceased had been attended by Dr Merigny had been evaded or suppressed by his mother.

What need of this certificate? Why should any one doubt Catholina's death, if affirmed by the inmates of the house! Something whispered to the consciousness of the young man: "Catholina was an heiress. You will be very rich." He thrust the paper into the drawer, as if its touch burned his fingers. He liked it not, nor could he tell why. The first faint light of morning fell upon the floor. He extinguished the taper and went softly to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN IN THE WALL.

It is time that we returned to the man in the wall. It will be remembered that before Jean Louis had finished his compulsory labour, this unfortunate victim began to recover from the effects of some narcotic which had been administered to render him oblivious and passive while he was being immured. His emotions returned to consciousness, and saw the wall actually growing beneath the hands of Jean Louis, ere of a nature too terrible to be sketched by the pen. Clink! clink! clink! That was the sound of a sledge. Just then, something reached his ears that startled him still more; it was the voice of De Villanille, stealing coldly, remorselessly into his grave. Those tones cleared his perceptions and his memory for a moment. A veil of hypocrisy was suddenly removed from his eyes. He grasped the motive—he knew why he was to die, and how hopeless would be his appeal to one who had deliberately determined upon such an act. He began to study the face of the executioner; he concentrated upon him all the power of his mind, and his gaze grew worked up and rendered intense, as it was, by horror

and indignation. He caught Jean Louis' eyes—held them fast—if they quivered and fell, they came back again. He saw his hands tremble, and knew that his condition appealed to his pity. The chord of sympathy was established. Jean Louis could help seeing and compassionating him. A fluctuating sickly hope sprang up in the man's breast. Perceiving that shaking hand, that so reluctantly spread the mortar, had been initiated into the sublime secret of the mystic brotherhood that have passed down through the generations, linking the dead and the living, the past and the future, in one unbroken chain of human fellowship. He signed the sign, and, with thrilling emotions of joy, saw the trowel of the bricklayer mark a mystic writing in the air. He now noted every motion of the bricklayer. He watched the descent of every trowelful of mortar which he accidentally, or apparently, let fall. While he was laying the last course the man behind the wall had examined the lump of clay, and took from it a stout pocket-knife. As the light was being shut out, the wall rapidly closed upon him. Three bricks more would complete the tomb. *Two—one*, and while they were being placed he could not repress that shriek of despair which was destined to haunt for ever the ears of Jean Louis and De Villanville. He heard the latter inspecting the wall, and striking upon it with the trowel, then retreating footsteps, and he was alone in his grave.

Philip De Noyan—the entombed—had a strong heart. He resolved not to die without an effort for life. With the blade of the knife he pried small holes through the yet soft mortar. He was successful, by the little jets of air that he could

upon his hand. He picked out the dry mortar
his knife, and, by one hour's toil, loosened a
stone. To remove other stones was compara-
y easy; and he heaped them in one corner of his
chre. He reached the softer earth, which he
ned, dragging it away with his hands. Finally, he
st his arm through into an open space, and was
ly suffocated by a terrible odour that rushed
him. He discovered he had penetrated a drain
place where the bricks and cement had fallen
7. Listening an instant he heard the roar of the
issippi—a sound that was perfect melody to his
es. The conclusion was obvious—the drain had
utlet in the river. He enlarged the opening, and
stood in the drain, to his knees, in the yielding
. He had taken but a few steps before he
me aware that the conduit had other inhabi-
s. Scores of rats, disturbed by his presence,
ed into life and activity. As he advanced, the
urbance increased. At first, they fled; but now
turned, and leaped, hungry and venomous, upon
owed shoulders, his head, his face, his arms. They
led up his limbs, and attacked him with the fury
igmy imps. It was in vain that he shook them off
ransfixed them with his knife. Resistance made
a more fierce, while the scent of blood, mocking
r starvation, maddened them. He fell, arose,
led on. A feeble light cheered him. He felt a
th of fresh air, heard a rush of waters, and, with
ream of pain and madness, cast himself head
most into the Mississippi, which swept him away
a feather.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VAULTS.

RAYMOND slept five hours. He joined the family breakfast refreshed in body, but uncomfortable in mind. His mother remarked his haggard looks.

"You must try and shake off this gloominess, son," said madame, tenderly. "You are certainly greatly changed since you visited us before. You are growing too old and thoughtful."

"We all change; none of us for the worse, I hope," he answered, with an effort at cheerfulness.

"It is love, perhaps," added madame, playfully.

"I never but once thought I loved," replied Raymond.

"Who was the favoured creature?"

"Catholina," returned her son.

"Catholina!" exclaimed madame, quite astonished. "I was not aware that you had seen her since she was a child."

"You know she received her education at a Northern school. I met her at Philadelphia little more than a year ago," replied Raymond.

"Why did you conceal the fact from us?" asked madame, turning pale.

"It was not ingenuous, mother; but we thought it would surprise you, some time, with the secret and the friendship that grew out of it. I exacted a promise from Catholina to that effect."

"And her father?"

"He was with her. He was about leaving for the South. I was obliged to return to my studies, but not till I had learned to love my cousin. I did not hear from uncle Philip again till your letter informed me of his decease. Mother, I cannot make her seem dead."

Raymond's voice was now thick with emotion.

"Madame De Villanville sank into a chair, deprived of strength. What she had heard appeared to fall upon her with annihilating power.

"We had not thought of Catholina in that connection," said De Villanville. "We have different views for you, my son."

"Give me some wine, Raymond," gasped madame.

Raymond went to a sideboard, but there was no wine there. "I will run to the cellar. I can put my hand on your choicest brands in the dark. I have forgotten nothing about the house, above or below."

"I'll go!" returned his father.

Raymond was already out of the room. "Poor boy! poor boy! We have struck at him unwittingly."

"We might have married them," said madame.

"Yes," said De Villanville, stopping, "but we can do better. He must have wealth; our son Raymond must have wealth. We have begun—we must pass on; there is now no such thing as retreat. He must marry the daughter of Rosendale the banker, whose boards are countless."

"Will not the difference of faith raise an obstacle?"

"If there should chance to be love in the case, no. Rosendale idolises his daughter, and he also idolises gold. He knows that the alliance with my son would be a good one in a worldly point of view. We must arrange it, Leonora; we must arrange it."

"Still, I should like him better if he were not a Jew," mused madame.

By this time De Villanville had partially recovered his equanimity. The thought of bringing millions into the family acted upon him wondrously.

"I shall forward your wishes," added his wife, presently. "It is, as you say, a great thing to have wealth to one's children. Riches sometimes weigh heavily against rank. Besides, Rosendale is a prince among his people, and that is much."

Raymond entered with a bottle of wine. The spiders had woven webs over it; it had the rare marks of age. He drew the cork and poured a glass for madame. She took it with a smile, and was raising it to her lips, when Raymond remarked: "There is a frightful stench in the vaults; they need ventilation."

"The drain! the drain!" exclaimed De Villanville.

"Before I went away to college you were very particular, father, about the wine vaults."

"They must be looked to," interposed his mother. "This epidemic has drawn your father's attention in other directions."

"It seemed to proceed," continued Raymond, "from a new portion of the wall."

"From a new portion of the wall!" repeated De Villanville, drinking.

"Some recent repairs, I suppose?"

"Yes," responded monsieur, "some recent repair. The old wall was insufficient, and there was an offensive ooze from the drain."

"Now I remember there was a niche there. I'll wager, my dear father, that you've been walling up some choice brands of wine, to be opened some year hence, on some happy or memorable day."

"You deceive yourself," returned De Villanville. "but guarded against the encroachments of the drain."

"Bad air is the father of contagion. It is frightful unsafe to have such an enemy imprisoned beneath u

It is said there is a skeleton in every house, and ours is in the vaults."

"True, my son," answered the father; "you talk like Hypocrates himself. Please fill my glass again, and another for yourself. What a flavour to this vintage! I like to have it salute my nostrils before it reaches my lips. I will give orders to Pierre about the drain."

"I love not the fellow. That face of his should belong to a rascal."

At that moment the face of Pierre Lereau appeared at the door. "Pierre," added monsieur, "tell Joseph to put the horses to the carriage. Raymond, we will call on Rosendale the banker. I wish you to make his acquaintance."

Madame regarded her husband with an expression of gratitude and relief. He was like his former self, and she rejoiced. His morbid fancies were passing away.

CHAPTER XVI.

CATHOLINA—THE BRICKLAYER'S SECRET.

CATHOLINA soon sank into a sleep, which held her in its soft bondage till three o'clock in the morning. When she awoke, Suzanne was watching beside her. She inquired for Doctor Merigny. Suzanne opened the door and informed the doctor that his patient was awake. He had just come in, and entered her room in considerable perturbation. Catholina observed his disorder—his flushed face, his hurried respiration. "What has happened?" she asked, anxiously.

"I have been out, and I have been pursued. Two persons gave me a frightful run; happily I evaded them."

"You, too, have enemies," said Catholina.

"If one like you has them, who may expect to escape? How do you feel, mademoiselle?"

"I cannot tell you. I am calm—I know that I exist. It has been very terrible, monsieur. Sit by me, and tell me all that has happened since the moment I trusted in you, and put the strange drug to my lips. She spoke with singular composure and sweetness.

"I fear it will shock you."

"Be not apprehensive. A danger past is not like a danger to come. Remember that I survived the shock of that startling announcement that I was dying by poison. What new sensation is left for me after that?"

Doctor Paul could not resist this appeal. Seated by her bedside, he related all that had happened to her supposed decease and interment. She listened with shuddering earnestness. "Your life attempted," she said. "It was intended that you should never reach home. The long and circuitous ride, the needless windings and turnings, the imperativeness with which your services were demanded, all show a settled purpose from the beginning."

"True, mademoiselle. The more I reflect upon the subject, the deeper are my convictions that I was to be sacrificed. I am supposed to be dead and lost in the rushing waters of the great river. But I am here, to identify my happiness and my fortune with yours; that is, if you yet trust in me."

"It is too great a sacrifice," said Catholina, with start and a blush.

"Nay, mademoiselle, it is not enough. They believe me dead, and to them and the world, I am, and will be, dead."

"I will not permit it," answered Catholina, with a determined wave of her white hand.

"You no longer believe in me," said Merigny, gently.

"More than ever."

"Then you will let me have my own way, mademoiselle?"

"It does not become me to dictate to you, but my gratitude impels me to seek your good. My own feeble life you may dispose of as you will. It is yours; you have won it from the grave. But why should you die so young, and forego fame?"

"To cast a sacred shield of protection around you, and subserve the wise designs of Providence in bringing guilt to its fitting reward," returned the doctor, with warmth. "Catholina, will you trust yourself with Doctor Paul yet once more?"

"If it will make you happier. I, too, am dead where I ought to be alive and loved. You would isolate yourself and me! Is it not so?"

"It is, mademoiselle."

"Catholina blushed and was silent. The lily whiteness of her cheeks soon came back.

"I have ceased to doubt," she said.

"I thank you! Be assured. It is you who oblige me. I shall not leave the city. I have already selected a place for retirement, where we will bide our time and see the drama go on. Catholina, you tremble!"

"Forgive me. I thought I had conquered. But this is the last struggle; you shall not see me tremble again."

"Catholina! you are unselfish, you are brave. How admirably you bear your misfortunes. How generous is your confidence. I have a sister in whom you will find fitting companionship."

"Do not think me so ungenerous," said Catholina, giving Doctor Paul her hand. "In future, tell me your wishes—that will be sufficient."

Doctor Paul was for a moment bewildered by this graceful and beautiful girl. He was a thousand times repaid for what he had done. One grateful glance of those soft eyes rewarded his efforts and his danger. He left her with a flame in his heart that nothing but death could extinguish. Before responding to the call of Catholina, Merigny had sent Jean Louis to the Jew quarter of the city to procure a suitable disguise, believing himself no longer safe in the bricklayer's blouse. Jean went rather reluctantly on this errand; he was ready to believe that Merigny had been mistaken for another, and he himself was that other. It is true that he had guarded the secret of the man in the wall faithfully; but the active agents in that wicked transaction were probably afraid to trust him longer and had determined upon his destruction. The deeper darkness that precedes the dawn hung over the city. The streets were deserted. He heard no sounds, saw now and then the distant rumbling of a cart, a sign of life so dissonant that he had rather have listened to the quickened throbs of his own heart. Was that footstep? Was some person walking behind him? His fears suggested these queries every moment, but as often as he paused, he found that his imagination had deceived him. It would have been better for Jean Louis had he gone forward at a venture; for while he stood looking into the dark narrow vortex of the streets, he felt himself struck in the side with a sharp instrument. The sudden pain of the thrust made the bricklayer break away from the assassin be-

fore the blow could be repeated. Jean ran, and as he ran he drew a pistol from his pocket, which, of late, he seldom ventured from home without. Hearing his unseen assailant at his heels, he partially turned, fired at hazard, and continued his flight. It was not long before he stood at his own door. He entered his cottage, greatly agitated, his garments smeared with blood. With one wild look at her husband, Suzanne cast herself into his arms. Merigny was just leaving Catholina's room, and was in the act of closing the door.

"Come! come!" said Merigny. "Compose yourself, Madame Louis. Would you smother your husband? Is it not more rational to examine his wound and stop the bleeding?"

"It is," replied Suzanne, instantly struck with the common sense of the suggestion, and, with the sudden reaction to which woman is subject, immediately and efficiently assisted the doctor to remove Jean's coat and waistcoat. The wound was found.

"How did this happen, my friend?" asked Merigny.

"I felt steel in my side; that is about all I can tell you. I did not stop for a second blow. I fired that pistol on the floor. After that, I heard no more footsteps. I don't know whether I hit the villain or not."

"Can you account for this?"

"I have a *secret*!" answered the bricklayer.

"And a heavy secret it has been," said Suzanne. "He went away one night, and came back terribly changed. He has not been himself since. It has preyed upon him like a disease. He starts in the night, and mutters strangely about bricks and mortar."

"Do you feel well assured that it involves your life?"

"I have always thought so. But I shall tell it; I

can keep it no longer. I have kept it faithfully for more than twelve months, and this thrust in the side is my reward. I know where it came from—nothing will convince me that it is not from *them*.”

“Who are ‘them’?” queried Merigny.

“That is the secret which I am going to tell you.”

“Do you think he ought to tell, doctor, if it puts his life in danger?” asked Suzanne.

“It is something dreadful, I am sure! I hope it was not murder, Jean?”

“There are some secrets better kept than told; but I am of the opinion that this is not one of them.”

The bricklayer began and told the thrilling story of the man in the wall, in a voice scarcely above a whisper. He had two breathless auditors. Suzanne raised her hands occasionally and let them fall listlessly, in attestation of her unspeakable horror. Merigny sat in silence, his face alone bearing witness to his emotions.

“And so you walled him up?” gasped Suzanne.

“Soul and body!” responded the bricklayer. “You remember, doctor, my singular conduct when I reached the mansion from which we took *her*?” He pointed to the adjoining room. “I do, distinctly.”

“No wonder; for the spot brought back recollections of my midnight work. Do you also recollect my perturbation when the gentleman addressed us in the hall? I came near dropping my end of our burden. That was one of the men in masks. I knew the voice. I built the wall in that house, in the vaults beneath.”

“You and I, Jean Louis, have become strangely connected with a web of crime. The assassin’s dagger may be said to be ever at your breast. You must be wise, prudent, discreet, and subtle as the silent snake.

One common fate menaces all beneath this roof. By acting advisedly and in concert, we will turn aside steel and bullet, and pull "ruin and ignominy upon the house of De Villanville," said Doctor Paul, arising, and speaking earnestly.

"There'll be no safety for me," asserted the brick-layer. "Those terrible words have haunted me so long: 'Wherever you may go, the assassin's dagger will find you.' Think of that!"

"Courage, courage, my friend!" returned Merigny. "We are strong in the right. Besides, if we say the word, the sword of justice falls like lightning!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FRANCISCA THE JEWESS—PRECAUTION.

RAYMOND accompanied his father, caring little whither he went. The house of the banker was outwardly unpretentious, but within he found unmistakable signs of wealth and elegance. Rosendale was a respectable looking man, somewhat past the middle age. He received De Villanville and his son with marked courtesy and ease. While he conversed with De Villanville, he mentally summed up Raymond, and arrived, no doubt, at a product satisfactory to himself. Presently he tinkled a little silver bell. As if in response, another party appeared, who had more interest for the eyes of Raymond than the grey-haired banker. It was a young lady, who swept slowly, almost noiselessly into the room.

"My daughter Francisca," said the Jew.

"My son Raymond," said De Villanville.

The young man had already arisen. The eyes of

the youthful pair met. Francisca the Jewess reminded Raymond of Catholina and Mademoiselle Merigny but hers was a darker and more imperious beauty. Raymond was not without enthusiasm, and Francisca despite his recent agitation and sorrow, made his heart glow and beat faster. De Villanville and Rosendale withdrew to a remote corner of the room, and kept up a low and animated conversation. Raymond did his best to entertain the fair Jewess. To his surprise he found her as accomplished as lovely.

Raymond left the banker's dazzled and bewildered but without that charm that Mademoiselle Merigny had cast over him. His father was in better spirits and talked more cheerfully on their return. He felt assured that every heart must succumb to the witchery of Francisca. He went directly to madame and told her his impressions, representing her as a marvel of perfection, and entirely irresistible.

"Our son Raymond will be very rich, Leonora?"

"Yes, Philip."

"But sometimes he is frightful. Do you remember how he talked of the vaults and of the drain? An evil spirit seems to possess the boy at times. A skeleton in the cellar, indeed!"

"Cease to think of it. The conversation came up by the merest chance, and in the most natural manner. Another wall must be built."

"I'll have no more walls!" cried De Villanville. "The trowels, the clinking and hammering, would kill me! Ah, here is Pierre."

"Why is your arm in a sling, Pierre?"

Pierre glanced at madame, and answered: "I got a little scratch last night."

"You are lying!" said De Villanville, sharply. "Come; I mistrust what you have been doing."

"I feared to trust our secret any longer in such keeping. If he should be seized with the fever, he would send for a magistrate and confess all."

"It is true, Philip," affirmed madame.

"I know it is," said De Villanville, reflectively. "But I was willing to spare the poor man. So you tried the dagger?"

Pierre made an affirmative gesture.

"And succeeded?" queried madame, breathlessly.

"And *failed*. I struck; he did not fall; he ran; I pursued; he turned and shot me in the arm."

"The failure is more to be regretted than the attempt," said De Villanville, coldly. "You should have dealt a sure blow."

"You should have seen the dagger! I buried it in his side. He cannot live; no one could live with such a wound," replied Pierre, confidently. "He must have fallen dead before reaching home."

"I hope this affair may turn out as you say," said De Villanville. "I own that the bricklayer has troubled me. Pierre, you have been faithful, and you shall have your reward."

There was no weakness or hesitation in monsieur's expression then. The matter of Pierre's *reward* was already settled. The man felt a chill upon him as he went out, and the chill lasted him the remainder of the day. Perhaps it came of his wound; possibly he caught it from the eyes of madame. The latter and monsieur were silent as long as they could hear the footsteps of Pierre.

"What were you thinking of, Philip?"

"He must follow the others," said De Villanville.

"We are too much in his power, Philip," answered madame, softly. "He holds us as in an iron yoke. With what perfect impunity he can control us, ay, menace and insult us, if he will."

"It is one of the penalties of—of—copartnership."

The concluding word did not seem to fit the sense of the sentence; it was like putting a new piece of cloth upon an old garment. There was another word in the mind of De Villanville, but he instinctively rejected it.

"Copartnership should never extend beyond husband and wife. What they cannot accomplish should remain undone. You and I, Philip, are sufficient for everything. I objected to Pierre at the beginning. We own nothing; Pierre owns all. We shall leave nothing to Raymond; everything is in the hands of Pierre. You are not the master of this house, Philip; Pierre is master."

"Your words are terribly true, Leonora!" cried De Villanville. "What we have done has been for Raymond. Shall he be robbed of the fruits of our efforts? Never!"

De Villanville's eyes flamed with anger.

"You are like yourself," she said, well pleased to see him take the matter so earnestly. "But let us waste neither time, words, nor breath." Both had lowered their voices, and madame's senses of hearing and seeing were acutely on the alert. "Decide upon the method," she added.

"Not without thought. It must be quick, at least, for his suspicions must not be aroused. Pierre must not talk on his deathbed."

"No more!" said madame, warningly. "I hear his steps in the hall; he is coming, and hurriedly too."

Monsieur smoothed his face, and looked up inquiringly, as Pierre approached. They observed that he was somewhat disturbed.

"What has happened?" asked madame.

"Nothing of consequence—that is, nothing that does not happen almost every day. The body of a man, evidently murdered, was taken from the river to-day. It was found across a hawser, against which the current had swept it."

"It was the body of—" De Villanville checked himself.

"It was not the one you are thinking of," continued Pierre; "it was the *other*."

"The *other*?" repeated his auditors.

"Yes, it was Carl. There was a deep wound in his breast."

"Another failure!" muttered De Villanville. "It would seem, Pierre, that your plans are but awkwardly carried out."

"There are various ways of accounting for this," resumed Pierre. "Carl may have finished his work in the manner intended, and afterward the gold may have tempted the eyes of a drunken comrade. Or, both he and the other may have perished in the struggle. The doctor was an active man, you know; he may have had strength to wrest away the dagger and deal that ugly thrust. How easy for them to roll from the Levee together."

"I wish I could believe it without doubt, for uncertainty in a case like this is miserably annoying. This affair must be looked into. We must set a watch

on Merigny's house. No one must go in or come out without being observed."

"The same idea has occurred to me; not that I have very serious fears," answered Pierre. "I'll go and attend to it at once."

"Do so, good Pierre. But, look you, employ no agents. With us three"—he nodded his head slightly toward madame—"all is safe. We have tried, and we trust each other. Is it not so, my friend?"

It was not usual for the proud De Villanville to call Pierre his friend. He was not only surprised, but secretly startled. He singularly thought of the serpent sliming the bird he was about to swallow.

"It is true, monsieur," he replied. "It is not prudent to share our knowledge with another; we are enough. As you say, we can trust each other."

"When you want money," pursued De Villanville, anon, "you have only to draw on me. You will find me no niggard. I never forget those who serve me."

"Monsieur is very good," returned Pierre. "With your permission, I will go and attend to the matter on Dauphine Street."

Promising to be diligent and faithful, Pierre Lereau hastened to fulfil his new commission.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"GONE OUT."

WHILE De Villanville was discussing these matters with Pierre, Raymond was on the way to Dauphine Street. Reaching the doctor's office, he observed, placed beneath Merigny's name in a window, the following words, written very legibly on a slip of

paper: "Gone out. Will be in soon." He had not, on his previous visits, noticed this announcement; but supposed that it must have been there. He rang; a strange face appeared at the door—a woman, with a most uncommunicative air. He inquired for Merigny. "Gone out," she said, listlessly.

"Where has he gone? When will he return?"

The impassive portress stared him in the face as if she could not comprehend his meaning. Raymond began to lose patience. "Inform Mademoiselle Merigny that I would see her," he said.

"*She* has gone too."

"Gone! Where? When will she come back?"

"She won't come back."

"Idiot!" exclaimed Raymond, no longer able to govern his impatience. "Can you not comprehend? Have you quite lost your wits? Tell me at once where mademoiselle may be found?"

"People that go away can't be found," she answered, with solemnity. "You can't find her; nobody can find her. Don't ask questions. You are mad, young man. Terror of the plague has driven away your senses."

"Stand aside, poor maniac," said Raymond, gently pushing her from the door and entering the hall.

"You needn't look for her here. Go and search for her in the black burial swamp, back of the city. I tell you she has gone out, and will not return. She has gone after her brother."

Raymond turned from her with secret awe, and glanced in the office. He even went and tinkled the little bell on the doctor's table. Neither footstep nor voice answered.

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle!" he called.

"Mademoiselle!" cried the woman at the top of her voice. "Mademoiselle. That's loud enough, isn't it? But you see she don't come." And she laughed and looked curiously at Raymond.

"Is she dead?" he demanded.

"Gone, *gone*? Gone after her brother. You can't find her; nobody can find her."

Raymond pointed to the card in the window.

"Yes, gone out," she muttered. "Will be in soon. Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

Raymond was now in the deepest perplexity. The woman was evidently mad. It was apparent that he could gain from her no reliable intelligence. Where was Edna? He hastened to the room where he had seen her the previous night. To the eye it remained the same; but she was wanting to give it life. "How long have you been here?" he asked.

"I count my life by the fevers that have come and gone. You look distressed. Perhaps you have carted somebody away to the swamp. What do you care? Ah, my pretty young gentleman. You are looking for Edna. She was a true Merigny. Too dainty, sir, she was for human love. Go away, monsieur, you are too mortal."

"In the name of God, good woman, collect your senses," entreated Raymond. "Pity my uncertainty. Say that she is living, and remove this horrible oppression from my mind."

A very slight change passed over the woman's visage. She sat down as if from weakness, and contemplated Raymond with curiosity and surprise. There was more intelligence in her gaze than she had

previously manifested. "Who are you?" she demanded, abruptly.

"My name is Raymond."

"How dare you?"

"How dare I what?"

"So your secret is out. But don't put your thoughts up there. That name is too high for you. Go, and never come again. She has but one love, and that is Doctor Paul."

The young man was astounded. He slowly retreated from the maniac; and, by some singular magnetism, seated himself where Mademoiselle Edna had sat some hours before.

"Has it then gone so far?" she added. "Have you yielded so quickly and entirely? Is your life so bound up in it. Poor fool."

Raymond was more and more confounded. He glanced within, and perceived that he had indeed gone far. His rapidly throbbing heart, his quivering nerves, his flying pulses, told him that he loved Edna. His pain at her disappearance confirmed the silent and emphatic affirmation. Will you tell me that she lives?" he asked humbly, almost abjectly.

"Yes, she lives; but she is dead to *you*."

"No matter who she be dead to, if she be but yet alive. I thank you for so much that is intelligible."

"You will never see her again. Don't haunt this house; don't come day after day to worry me with useless inquiries. I have told you all I shall ever tell you about her."

"This is surprising," muttered the young man. "Speak to me of Merigny?"

"Look at the card. Don't that tell you? Can't

you read, young gentleman? 'Gone out. Will come in soon.' Ha, ha! What will the yellow monster say to that? What can make Doctor Paul break his word? He will not lie, though the plague should meet him face to face. Let the carts rumble, and tumble, and trundle, and rattle over the stones; he won't mind them a straw. There! that is when you want to know anything, just read the card. You'll always find it just there in the window, where he left it."

The woman's excitement had gradually subsided, she did not fluctuate back to her dull, apathetic starting point. There was still animation in her eyes and countenance.

Raymond slowly passed into the hall, and then into the street, wishing the while to ask more concerning Edna, but convinced of the utter hopelessness of obtaining further information. The thought that of mad women she was the strangest, was in his mind. He walked mechanically up the street, crossed and returned on the opposite side. He stopped, looked vaguely at the doctor's card, and pondered upon what he had heard.

The whole Merigny household had now become a mystery. The doctor's unaccountable absence, his sudden return in disguise, and the solemn vow of silence that he himself had made, were fresh in memory. Where had he gone? What did this card on the window mean? He wished to see him. He was anxious to question him in regard to Catholina. There were many things that he desired to ask. From these reflections he returned, with unerring certainty, to Mademoiselle Edna. In her disappearance he felt that he had

ained a loss. He began to realize his feelings respecting her. Did he love her? He shrank from the question; for, to admit the affirmative, seemed like wrong to Catholina.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROOMS OPPOSITE.

WHILE Raymond was thus mentally employed, he saw Pierre coming up the street on the other side, and not wishing to be seen by him, and curious to know the motive of his visit to that quarter, retreated into an alley just behind him. He was considerably surprised to see the man pause at the doctor's door and ring. The same woman who had so worried Raymond answered the bell. The young man shrank close to the wall, and watched the parties. He tried to hear what was said, but could not. The conversation was short, and evidently decisive. Pierre remained discomfited a moment on the steps, then crossed the street, stopping every instant to look back at the writing in the window. Raymond heard him repeat the words as he reached the sidewalk a little above his hiding place. He wondered what interest the man could feel in Doctor Merigny.

"Gone out!" muttered Pierre. "Yes; I trust he has gone out, never to come back!"

Raymond's ears were open. Pierre's words thrilled him strangely. Another link in the chain of evidence was being placed in his hands. That there had been a crime, or attempted crime, he felt assured; a consciousness of it was momentarily growing upon him, and intensely appealing to him.

"Will be in soon?" added Pierre. "Why don't they pull down that lying paper? Ah! what is this 'Rooms to let.' Just the thing!"

Raymond immediately heard the clattering of an old fashioned knocker, then the opening and shutting of a door, then the shuffling sound of feet ascending the stairs. Raymond remained in the alley till Pierre came out of the house and went away. He did not venture from the alley till he was out of Dauphin Street, then emerging, took a survey of the premises. The announcement, "Rooms to let," was pasted to the door of the house exactly opposite Doctor Merigny's. The young man seized the knocker, and a middle-aged female opened the door. "The paper on your door has induced me to trouble you," he said. "Have you front rooms?"

"I had, a few minutes ago, but have but one now," she answered.

"You let it to the person who just went away, probably?"

"Yes; and he didn't dispute about terms, which isn't common. Come this way, sir, and I'll show you a room fit for a prince. It isn't everybody can get such accommodations, and they ought to be thankful that can."

The woman wiped her face with her apron, and seemed deeply impressed with the closing part of his remark. She conducted him upstairs.

"So he engaged a room?" said Raymond.

"Ay; and paid for it in advance. That's the way to do business. Send me such customers, say I am a poor widow, monsieur, depending on what I get for a living."

"Is the gentleman going to stop here himself?" asked Raymond, scarcely conscious that she had been speaking. "Yes, 'tis for his own self; and here or not here, he'll pay the same. He's one of the rich folks, I expect, and the rich folks will have their own way." She opened a door. "This is the room, monsieur. 'Tis it a beauty for this city, where all the houses are built so low that you can scarcely stand up in the chambers? Here you can move round without bumping your head against the ceiling. And it is so cheap; cheap, monsieur. Look at that bed, will you? One could sleep on it with a burning fever, it is so soft and clean. And the chairs. There's not one of 'em that'll lay you down when you trust your weight on it."

"Is there another entrance?"

"There is a back door, monsieur; but gentlemen generally don't like to come in at the back door."

"I will take this room, and will come in at the back door."

"You have not asked the terms, monsieur."

"I care nothing for the terms. But there are a few additional words to our bargain: You are to admit me by the back entrance, and never let me be seen by the person who has hired the adjoining apartment."

He went home, disturbed with new fears. Doubt hung over him like a black cloud. Painful misgivings haunted him.

"Raymond," said his mother, "I have been up to your chamber. I noticed that the clothes you wore yesterday were soiled with clay. Absolutely, my son, he would think you had been grave digging."

"And not be guilty of a great mistake," he said.

"Sit down, mother, and let me tell you what I have done. I found the carrier who had buried Catholina. He conducted me to the spot where he said he had laid her. There was a fearful concert of spades on the ground there, mother. Lanterns danced about like fire flies. The hoarse voices of the diggers arose in irreverent song, or vulgar jest and careless laughter. But I stopped by the reputed grave of Catholina. I told the carrier to dig."

"Dreadful!" said Madame De Villanville, shivering.

"The man scraped away the earth—some six or eight inches thrown lightly upon a black box. The spade soon gave a hollow sound on the lid."

"Frightful boy! You have gone mad."

Madame snatched her vinaigrette from the table and was much agitated.

"I leaped into the shallow pit," resumed Raymond steadily to his purpose, "and wrenched off a portion of the lid with a pick. Mother, what do you think I saw?"

"Unhappy boy! How you shock me. Push away your chair—don't come nearer."

"What do you think I saw?" repeated her son.

"Catholina," answered Madame, in a hoarse whisper.

"No; it was not Catholina; it was a bearded fellow black with the plague spot."

"Shocking! shocking! How could you? How dare you? Then you came home, reeking with contagion and death."

"Mother, did you not hear me say that it was not Catholina?" Raymond spoke sternly, and looked firmly at his mother.

"It was but a blunder of the stupid, dreadful carrier. For your sake I am glad that there was a mistake."

"He protests that there was no mistake; that he buried the box which he took from the carrier who first came to the house, and marked the mound with a wooden cross. We found the cross and the mound, but not her I sought."

"So, my son, you discovered that two carts came for our poor child? I suppose it was a natural consequence of hurried orders; for Pierre was much confused that night. He ran about like one distracted. The circumstance that troubled you so much is easily explained. The last carrier took the wrong box from the wrong cart, so that Catholina lies buried no one knows where."

"It was, to say the least," returned Raymond, "a very singular occurrence. It is our duty to sift the matter to the bottom, and find out where her remains were deposited. She must rest in no unnoted grave."

"True, true!" gasped Madame De Villanville, alarmed she knew not why. "My son, you frighten me! Who but a maniac would prow! among graves at night? You fill me with horror!"

"I am sorry," pursued Raymond, "that I cannot find Doctor Merigny. I wish to draw from him the particulars of Catholina's death. He attended her, did he not?"

"He was sent for," she stammered, a hot flush suffusing her forehead, "but——"

"I saw the certificate," interposed Raymond, abruptly and coldly.

"Ah, I remember! He arrived a few moments before she breathed her last, but I did not see him."

"But what need of that certificate?"

"A mere legal form, Raymond."

"It has to me a cold and worldly look. How could one think of property at such a moment? I should have thought of her only, though she had left the world to be inherited by me. It is very unaccountable about Doctor Merigny," Raymond went on. "His mysterious disappearance dates from the time of his visit to this house."

"I was not aware of that. I wonder that all the doctors are not swept away. I have heard of the falling down and dying in the street; they are exposed, and take it in such a virulent form."

"Did he walk or ride home?"

She felt her son's eyes upon her, and kept her eyes cast down.

"I don't know; you must ask Pierre. I think, however, that he walked; for I now recollect seeing both Pierre and Joseph busy about the house immediately after Catholina expired."

"Who went for the dead-cart?" asked Raymond pointedly.

"Pierre, but not immediately. There! a truce to this dismal subject. And do not come very near me for the next twelve hours, my son, for I am really afraid of you. I did not imagine that you were such a terribly resolute creature. You have shocked me, Raymond. I am not made of iron. It was the act of a madman. Your nerves must be in a frightful flutter. You had better go to your chamber and consult a physician."

"There is no need, dear mother. The excitement is past. I have given you pain; but I could not help it. I was inwardly constrained to make this confession, and say what I have said. I shall not

quite cheerful till I have cleared up the mystery and doubt that hang over Catholina."

With these words mother and son separated, to the relief of both.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MADMAN.

THE fever made such ravages in the city, that the De Villanvilles determined to go into the country for a few weeks. Raymond heard the proposition with pleasure, and set out at once. Monsieur and madame were to follow in a few days. Instead of the country, Raymond retired to Dauphine Street, and quietly took possession of the apartments he had secured, where he watched faithfully Doctor Merigny's house, and the comings and outgoings of Pierre. In Madame Leclerc, the widow who kept the establishment, he had a trusty ally. All was silent over the way. The card remained in the window. Those who came for the doctor rang till they were weary, and went away in anger or surprise. There was no sign of life within. Pierre Lereau duly installed himself in the adjoining room. The young man could hear him moving about hour after hour. To add to his security, Raymond wore a yellow wig and red whiskers, and dressed himself in the clothes of a sailor. The day after his removal to Madame Leclerc's, Raymond, whose door was open, saw her conduct two men up the stairs, and show them a rear room opposite his. One was about thirty-five years of age, rather tall, with the unmistakable prestige of a mariner. His face was weather-beaten and brown, but good-natured in expression.

His eyes were quick, sharp, with an evident twink of humour in them. The other was older, shorter stature, with neglected hair and beard, wild and wandering eyes, and squalid cheeks. He entered the room with considerable dignity, but presently began close inspection of every corner, and the little closed behind the door. Finally, approaching Madame Leclerc cautiously, and placing his open hand partially over his mouth, as if to cut off what he was going to say from other ears, he said, in a startling whisper, "Rats! madame? Any rats?"

Madame Leclerc prudently retreated a step, asking "What do you say, sir?"

"Rats, rats, rats! Any rats?" The inquirer's pale face was thrust forward, and he waited for the woman's answer.

"Not a rat," replied Madame Leclerc.

"No rats! No rats!" exclaimed the questioner, turning to his taller companion. "Do you hear the Captain Triplett? There were rats aboard ship—armies of them, my friend! I could hear their sharp teeth at work between the timbers."

The mariner nodded his head good naturedly. The speaker again addressed Leclerc. "Can you speak with absolute certainty, good woman? Have you ever taken up the floor? Have you ever searched the interstices between the walls with long needles?"

"N—n—no!" faltered the woman, quite astonished and in defiance of the pantomime of the mariner, who signalled her to say "Yes."

"That is unfortunate!"

"Ahem! Avast there! Let's throw the lead to see we're out o' soundings. She means, messmate, the

she didn't do it with her own hand, but had it done, which amounts to the same thing."

"Is that your meaning, woman?" asked the other, with a frown.

"Yes," stammered the widow, this time taking her cue from the mariner.

"That is as it should be. Is this house of brick, or wood, or stone?" pursued he of the neglected beard, with an earnestness which attested how much he was interested in the question.

"Wood, every inch on't," replied the man who had been addressed as Captain Triplett. "That's plain as a ship's foremast."

"Certainly; all wood," asserted the widow, feebly.

"That is right. I hate brick walls and stone masonry. I take the room; but you must never talk of bricks in my presence."

"I don't know, monsieur, but this room is partly engaged," replied Madame Leclerc, by no means certain whether it were advisable to take such an eccentric lodger.

"I own a great deal of property, madame, and your terms are to me matters of the utmost indifference. I own all the houses on the opposite side of the street. Indeed, it would be hard to find a house that I haven't claim on. I have a desk full of mortgages, ma'am, but unfortunately the desk has been stolen. I have lost millions by dishonest people. My memory has failed very much too. I have forgotten the name of the street where I lived, and in fact my own. Triplett, my friend, what is my name?"

"Commodore," said Triplett.

"Thank you, captain." Then to the widow: "The

captain remembers everything. He has the most extraordinary memory in the world. You will please arrange all money matters with him. I never attend to pecuniary arrangements myself."

The widow's eyes were now dilated with wonder.

"You can retire a moment with the captain, and adjust the paltry details," added Commodore, with majestic wave of the hand.

Madame Leclerc was obviously very glad of permission, and with becoming apologies led the mariner into Raymond's apartment. "Lost your bearings, madame," touching his forehead. "My senses are all taken aback by the winds of adversity. He's on his beam-ends, ma'am, and can't right himself. But he's perfectly harmless in the main; though, in general thing, he mustn't be crossed. He's been terribly wronged, Commodore has, by somebody; if he ever gets his reason, there'll be an overhauling of the log, and a day o' reckonin'. He's a gentleman born, you see, and there's heaps o' knowledge in his head, when you happen to run afoul on't. I fished him out o' the Mississippi one night, as I was dropping down toward the Balise, and took him a v'y'ge to shore. He was a sight to see, ma'am, when I fust grappled him. He was bruised and wounded from stem to stern, and there wasn't a capful of wind in his lungs. I've tried to bring him about, but he won't answer helm, so I thought it best to house him up to the anchorage in port till his upper works can be put in sailin' order. You needn't be afeard, for he's gentle as a lamb; though there's a few things which I mustn't mention. He has excited spells, at which times it would be well for ye to keep away; for

might rake ye fore and aft with a broadside that might cut up your runnin' riggin' considerable. I shall be with him a good deal myself, ma'am; and I'll warrant that everything 'll go to your mind. He's had several gleams of sense lately, and I think he'll come out some day of a sudden. Then it 'll be worth something to know who has wronged, and robbed, and murdered him. As for me, I shall stick to him like a barnacle to a ship's bottom; and if he don't eventually drop anchor in the harbour of reason, it won't be any fault o' mine."

"What do you think of him, sir?" asked Madame Leclerc, appealing to Raymond.

"I confess that I sympathise with his unfortunate condition," the young man answered.

The pale face and melancholy voice of the demented man seemed not wholly strange to sight and hearing. His consciousness gave back an echo, but he could not trace it to its starting-point.

"Here's a taste o' salt-water. How fare ye, comrade?" Captain Triplett stretched out a great hand, which Raymond shook heartily. There was something in the man that pleased him.

"You've run into a snug harbour, messmate, and I hope you'll have a good time on't till you're ready for sea again. I'm glad you have a fellow-feeling for Commodore. He's been wrecked, as 'twere, and I've towed him into port without any expectation of sarvice. I never pass a strange craft in distress."

"A good principle. This man, you say, you took from the river. Could he give no account of himself?" Raymond asked.

"He'd entirely lost his reck'nin'. Mentally, he was

out o' soundin's, and hasn't touched bottom but once or twice since."

"How long since you fell in with him?"

"A little better nor a year ago, 'cordin' to the lads. He raved dreadfully, talkin' of rats, and walls, and drains, which nobody could make head nor tail on."

"Walls, and drains, and rats," repeated Raymond. "That is singular."

"Ay, but it has a meanin' to it. The fragment of memory which a madman keeps in his mind are the same to the doctor as a lighthouse to the navigator."

"No doubt—no doubt," replied the young man, looking curiously at the object of their conversation. Then to the widow: "Madame Leclerc, I think I may rely on what this man says."

"If monsieur is of that opinion, he can have his room."

At that moment the madman motioned to Trippe in the most mysterious manner, his countenance becoming exceedingly grave and troubled. Trippe, cheerfully answering the signal, Commodore cautiously led him to a corner, and whispered a few words in his ear. The captain then shook his head, and said "Nothing so soothingly."

"He wishes to know," added Trippe, returning to Raymond and Madame Leclerc, "if there is a doctor below. You must positively assure him that there is not, if he ever questions you in regard to it. That is the only way to manage him."

"I will humour him," said Madame Leclerc. The matter was quickly settled, and Captain Trippe and Monsieur Commodore were duly installed in their lodging-house on Dauphine Street, while Raymond

furnished with a new and singular train of thought, which might lead he knew not where.

CHAPTER XXI.

EDNA AND CATHOLINA.

"ALAS," sighed Suzanne, "we shall never know safety and peace again! I shall dream nightly of daggers and assassination. No wonder that poor Jean could not sleep in his bed. It is a fearful thing to be obliged to steal about the streets like a felon when one has committed no crime, nor to be able to hold his head among honest people."

There was a light step at the door and a timid knocking.

"She has come!" exclaimed Merigny. In a moment he was embracing his sister. "I knew you would come; I did not doubt your faithfulness," he added.

"Yes, I have come," she answered. "You know you have but to speak to command my services." She glanced about the room, as if in search of some one.

"She is *there*," said Merigny, pointing to the apartment that contained his treasure. "You shall see her soon. But first say something to these worthy people, who have also suffered from the evil deeds of the De Villanvilles. This is Jean Louis, the bricklayer, and this Suzanne, his wife. Jean can tell you the strangest story. The assassin's dagger is poised over his head. He cannot go out or come in in security. His life has just been assailed. Do not be alarmed; he is not dangerously injured. Those stains come from a mere flesh wound."

Edna rallied, and spoke some friendly words to

Suzanne and the bricklayer. "Ah, Paul," she whispered, presently, to her brother! "I fear to see this pretty, helpless creature of yours. I doubt whether am good enough to be what you wish to her."

"You are good enough to be a saint," he replied.

"Jealousy is sometimes cruel."

"Only with the cruel. Have you adjusted everything at the house for a long absence?"

"According to your instructions, Mrs Kirkland was induced to aid in your singular purpose. She knows her part, and will enact it well. The card that you used to leave sometimes, when you went out, I place in the window. It will be like an accusing ghost to the guilty. What will they think, seeing it there day after day? Then there will be the fear of a failure of their minds to give those simple words double significance."

"You are an invaluable ally. Will you see her now?"

"I will see her. But, Paul, I warn you that I shall hate her!"

"Opening a door, he led Edna to the bed where Catholina was reclining. She was white as a lily. "Mademoiselle Catholina, this is my sister. You cannot tell what pleasure it gives me to bring her to you."

Edna took Catholina's hand, and shivered while she held it in hers. The young girl's loveliness terrified her. She was assured that any one might love such a being. While she sympathized with Catholina's sufferings, a painful feeling of jealousy agitated her. "Mademoiselle," said Edna, "my brother has informed me what has happened. It is all very dreadful and you must not think of it. He has a plan, and

he thinks I am strong enough to help him. I don't know whether I can; I shall try."

"I shall leave you together," said Merigny, "while I make arrangements for our burial from human sight and observation. There is a building, not a stone's throw from the Old Barrack, which, I believe, will answer our purpose. It will not be tedious to be shut up there a few weeks or months, I am sure."

Edna glanced at Catholina and smiled.

"Jean Louis and his wife will be our housekeepers. Suzanne will be very useful. She can go and come in disguise, and provision our castle. And, for that matter, we will all have disguises," added the doctor, smiling. "Romance!" said Edna.

"None for you, for I shall keep you a close prisoner. I had intended that Jean Louis should attend to this; but since he is wounded, I must go myself."

"Stay, Paul!" said Edna, "it is far more prudent for you to remain within doors. Suzanne and I can do all that is to be done, with less risk and better speed."

"What, engage a house?"

"A dozen, if necessary."

"And make it ready to receive us?"

"Certainly. The vicinity of the Old Barrack will be watched to-day, I should suppose, on account of Jean Louis. The person who gave him that wound will wish to know its effects."

"You are right," answered Merigny. "It will, on reflection, be the safest for Jean and I to remain within doors to-day. To-night we will flit, like full-fledged birds, from the nest."

An hour later, Edna and Suzanne left the cottage on their errand. On the following day the little

dwelling of the bricklayer was found closed, and a piece of crape tied to the door-knob. The neighbours in passing, shook their heads, nothing doubting but that the pestilence had visited Jean Louis. Meantime the removal had safely taken place. The night, having been dark, favoured them. The house selected for their seclusion proved in every respect advantageous. Catholina submitted to the wishes of Doctor Merigny with charming grace and docility. Her health was hourly improving, and she did her best to appear cheerful and content. It was noticeable, however, that Edna grew silent and melancholy, and was often found with a thoughtful face and abstracted air.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STREET ADVENTURE.

ON the evening of the second day of his vigil, Raymond's attention was attracted by the appearance of a youth who stopped at Merigny's door, and having first pulled the bell-knob gently, rapped with a light walking stick which he carried. The fact that he both rang and knocked was noticed by Raymond. While he was mentally asking what would be the result of this double demand, the door was opened, and the youth admitted. "Ah!" said Raymond, "here is one at last who can gain entrance without question."

With increasing interest he waited for the lad to come out; but he seemed in no haste to reappear. While thus employed, he heard his fellow-watcher Pierre, descend to the street. He would scarcely have noticed this circumstance, had not Pierre stepped softly. Half an hour afterward, the object of Raymond

curiosity was let out by a woman—the same he had seen. Without delaying a moment, the lad moved away, but had proceeded but a short distance when Raymond saw Pierre stealing after him. It soon became evident that the youth was conscious of being closely observed by Pierre; he walked faster, and turned into another street. Raymond was near enough to the pursuer to note that he was greatly interested in the chase, and that momentarily his heat and hurry increased. Pierre was soon upon the flying boy, and laid a by no means gentle hand on his shoulder. “Why do you run, foolish boy?” he asked, holding him without difficulty. “Have you perpetrated some crime that you cannot walk the street without terror?”

It is doubtful what Pierre Lereau would have done next, or what his purpose was, for, at this juncture, Raymond hurried forward, and knocked him down. He struck hard, and the fellow lay quite bewildered in the street.

“Restrain your fears, my boy,” said Raymond, encouragingly. “He has not the power to harm you.” He pointed at the prostrate form of Pierre. The youth looked up—Raymond looked down. The former saw a red haired sailor; the latter, the fair face of Edna Merigny.

“The knave was intoxicated, probably, and intended to amuse himself with your fears. Come, let us walk on, and get out of this street,” he said.

Edna dared not trust her voice to reply, yet felt the necessity of saying something. She muttered some half audible words, then, affecting to laugh at what had happened, made a brave attempt to speak and act like a boy of fourteen or fifteen.

"Which way were you cruising, my lad?" inquired Raymond, somewhat nautically.

"Nowhere in particular," answered the seeming boy.

"Just where I was going; so I don't mind if I take a small craft like you in tow," added Raymond.

"Thank you for an honest mariner; but I shall take the next street that leads toward the Old Barrack which I know will be very much out of your way."

"Not a bit of it. I'd as lieves go on that tack as any other; so I'll jest keep alongside."

This friendly offer was not very joyfully received. It will be perceived that Raymond was resolved to find Mademoiselle Merigny's place of retirement. The mystery connected with her brother also urged on his curiosity. His companion was now less anxious to hasten, and was evidently taxing her ingenuity for plausible pretext to part company with the sailor.

"Do you know the person who followed you?" continued Raymond.

"I do not, although it seems to me that I have heard his voice before."

"When, and under what circumstances?"

"It was at Doctor Merigny's. A man came for the doctor. I was in the hall, and heard him make inquiries. I am not positive; I only say there is a similarity of voice."

"Possibly you put some trick upon him?" remarked Raymond, carelessly.

"No!" answered Edna, "I am not that kind of boy."

The young man could not repress a smile. He knew well why her white brow crimsoned.

"I was looking for a motive, my lad. I didn't mean to accuse you."

"You are a strange sailor!"

"And *you* a strange boy!"

"What do you mean to say?" asked Edna.

"I mean to say nothing."

"You have discovered something," said Edna, looking at him.

"Yes; how could I help it?"

"Am I, then, so awkward?" exclaimed Edna.

"No, mademoiselle, you are not awkward. But who ever saw such a face beneath a boy's cap, or such hands on a boy's wrists?"

"I am grateful for your efficient aid. Here we must part. Keep my secret."

"Your secret is safe. But let us not separate here. Allow me to attend you to your residence. It is quite dark, and you may again need my arm."

"There are reasons why it must not be."

"I care not for reasons!" answered Raymond. "I never betrayed one of your sex, and I never will. Can I not see and be silent?"

"There has been more than one discovery this night. Monsieur Raymond, I know you."

"Mademoiselle Merigny, I hope I have not offended. I trusted that this disguise would answer its purpose; but since it has not, perhaps it is for the best. I will own that I have been anxious, very anxious to see you."

"You have watched the house!" exclaimed Edna. There was reproof in her tones.

"And if I have, it was for no evil purpose," returned Raymond, respectfully. "There are certain questions that I wish to propose to your brother. If the thought of beholding *you* also influenced my actions, I trust my temerity will be pardoned."

Edna glanced at him haughtily.

"Singular events and coincidences have given me an interest in Doctor Merigny. I shall not be content till I have seen and conversed with him. You can assure him, however, that I shall respect my oath, and whatever occurs he may count on my silence. I know that his life was attempted, and that he is supposed to be dead. My solemn promise I have kept, and will; yet for various important reasons, I desire to know what place he has visited before that assault, and if he has any names in his possession that will lead to the discovery of the guilty parties. I cannot express the interest I feel in this matter."

"What Doctor Paul did not inform you, you need not expect to hear from me. I would gladly impart what you ask, in gratitude to your friendship; but I dare not whisper, even in the seclusion of my own room, that startling mystery. I have been true to Paul, thus far, but heaven only knows how long I may be patient with him. He mutters in his sleep of carriers and bricklayers."

"Carriers and bricklayers!" cried Raymond, involuntarily.

"You, too, are getting nervous, monsieur."

"I beg of you to proceed. What did he say of carriers and bricklayers?"

"I am terrified at my indiscretion. I shall soon prove unworthy to be trusted with anything of importance. Monsieur Raymond, stand where you are, and do not move till I have disappeared around yonder corner. My commands shall keep you in abeyance no longer than that. I expect that my wishes will be respected."

She turned from him and hurried away. He would have attempted to shake her resolution, but she gave him no opportunity for further appeals. He felt that it would be dishonourable to follow till she had reached the designated point; so he strained his eyes after her graceful figure till she flitted round the corner. There was a momentary debate in his mind whether he was then at liberty to pursue her; but it was of short duration, and was decided in the affirmative.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LISTENERS HEAR NO GOOD OF THEMSELVES.

RAYMOND ran to the corner and along the street in which Edna had disappeared. He could not see her, but knew she could not have gone far during the time that had elapsed. Seeing a lane at his right he inferred she must have taken that direction; so he went that way, and by his nimbleness atoned for his temporary hesitation. Arriving at where the lane terminated in a street, he heard a door open, and looking diagonally across the way, caught a glimpse of some one entering a house. It might have been Mademoiselle Merigny or the most dissimilar person in the world; but the mere fact of seeing some one enter at that particular crisis, and with evident haste, inspired him with the hope that he had really made a discovery. He soon stood opposite the dwelling, which was large, gloomy in appearance, and quite isolated. He watched, thinking he might see a glimmer of light; but saw not so much as the flash of a fire-fly from the dim windows. Some wooden steps led to the door. By a close inspection, he found on one of them the imprint of a foot,

small and feminine; it was traced in water, and faded while he looked at. There was nothing to hinder him from walking quite around the house, and he did so. Presently, large drops of rain fell on his face. The entrance to the rear of the building was through a low porch, the door of which stood ajar. As the rain was every moment falling faster, he did not hesitate to avail himself of this shelter. He went in, and heard the waters pattering merrily over his head.

The young man had been there but a little while, when he remarked some rays of light creeping into the darkness of the porch. A closer examination showed that it came from beneath a door, and through a crack in one of the lower panels. To the latter Raymond applied his eyes. The room into which he looked was obviously used for domestic purposes; in the middle of it, however, sat Doctor Merigny, in a pensive attitude, while the smallest possible taper was burning faintly on a brick hearth, where it had undoubtedly been placed to keep it from being seen from without. While our hero was contemplating this picture, Edna herself appeared. She no longer wore the garments of a lad, but a becoming wrapper. Raymond's first emotions were those of pleasure, but he dared not move lest an inadvertent step should alarm those within.

"Well, my sister?" said Merigny, starting from his reverie.

"I have returned," said Edna, "but not without adventure."

"Were you—did any one *dare*?" Doctor Paul half arose from his chair.

"Yes; some one dared to follow me. But he

received a great blow," added Edna, "and was prostrated to the earth."

"That is something, but not enough. Who came to your aid?"

"A red-haired sailor."

"A red-haired sailor!" repeated Dr Paul, laughing. "That blunts the edge of the romance. He should have been a fine-looking gallant."

"I will change him if you wish, Paul," said Edna. "What say you to Monsieur Raymond?"

It may be believed that Raymond was now all attention. His heart beat so hard that he feared its blows might be heard by mademoiselle.

"Monsieur Raymond!" said the doctor. "How could a red-haired sailor be that young gentleman?"

"Let him take off his red hair and whiskers," answered the young girl, with composure.

"Most singular. You surprise me much. This young man seems determined to be connected with our affairs. Do you know that his face reminds me of some one? He looks like the De Villanvilles."

"He is to be trusted, I think," returned Edna.

"I have his solemn pledge: I feel safe so far as he is concerned. But I hate a De Villanville. It is a name with terrible associations," said the latter, "but a fancied resemblance cannot affect Monsieur Raymond."

"Certainly not. The innocent should never suffer for the guilty. By the way, this De Villanville has a son at a Northern college, whom I have heard spoken of as a young man of high character. May I never meet him."

"For his sake, Paul, ought you not to pause, and let justice sleep?"

Raymond's faculties reeled with amazement. What words were those just dropped from those fair lips! Why should "justice slumber?" Justice and crime were associated together. Where had been the crime? *Crime* in connection with the De Villanvilles. What was it? How came Doctor Merigny within the circle of the evil deed? He felt his hopes dropping away one by one. The charm that Edna had cast upon his life must be broken: "I have had moments of relenting," replied Doctor Paul, "but when I think of the remorseless cruelty of that man, I dare not avert the vengeance of violated law. Think of the bricklayer's story."

"I had rather not, Paul. I should hear the sound of a trowel to-night in my dreams. I prefer to think of my hero. He has a noble countenance, Paul."

"Be careful, Edna, be careful," cried the doctor. "I see what will happen. You are going to love him."

"I am glad you have told me; I did not know it. I am sure you will love him as well as I do Theresa. His manly beauty is equal to her girlish charms."

Edna quietly seated herself opposite Paul, and watched the changes of his countenance. Raymond thought she spoke of him with too much calmness to give much encouragement to his hopes.

"He who robs me of your affections is my enemy," said Merigny, gravely. "No one shall step between us."

"There is one between us now; your doll, brother Paul."

"Her loveliness should disarm your jealousy," returned the doctor, seriously. "How can you look at her and entertain such feelings?"

"She is a lily among women. But I warned you

Take care of her, Paul, for I will not be answerable for her safety much longer." She spoke like one too much in earnest.

"You cannot mean this, Edna? An angel could not make me believe that you would harm her. But this romantic young man, who goes about in disguise to watch you, is another affair. Give him the slightest encouragement, and I swear to you I'll call him out!"

A heavy frown gathered upon the brow of Dr Paul.

"He has not asked for encouragement; that is, not directly."

Edna looked down at the little taper on the hearth, and wondered if there was a little flame in her bosom flickering and fluctuating like that.

"But he will!" interposed her brother, quickly. "He cannot help it, unless he be a stupid blockhead. You told him, probably, where to find you. It's a miracle if you did not let him follow you home. Possibly he is lurking around the house. If I hear a noise in the night I shall fire."

"It's a bad night to be lurking about, Paul; the rain is falling in torrents. Be content with Theresa, and don't shoot my lovers."

Raymond's face was wet with perspiration, but the descending drops did not cool the burning sensation in his cheeks. What strange matters he had heard discussed, and how little right he had to hear!

"Let there be an armistice till morning," answered Paul, presently. "Banish the image of this man, dear. Love *me*, and that will be enough for you. Good-night."

"Banish the image of this girl. Love *me*; that will be enough for *you*. Good night, Paul."

Merigny was leaving the room, when Edna added "Stop a moment. Is this door bolted?" She advanced to the door; and, to Raymond's consternation, lifted the latch and held it ajar an instant. A current of air rushing through the aperture fortunately extinguished the taper. She hastily shut the door and bolted it. Raymond heard them groping their way to their respective apartments, and then rushed away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOO MANY.

THE curiosity of Pierre was excited by seeing a youth so readily gain access where others had failed; and it was this that induced him to follow when he reappeared. The fact that the seeming boy quickened his pace as he approached but inflamed his desire to overtake him. When he had accomplished this, the terror and trepidation of Edna quickly betrayed her sex. Knowing that Doctor Merigny had a sister, Pierre at once concluded that it was her he had thus surprised. For the purpose of increasing her fears, and making her more submissive to the inquisition he intended to subject her, he made use of the language quoted in the previous chapter. But the blow that felled his frustrated his design in a most vexatious and humiliating manner. When he arose, with a confused and aching head, his anger was thoroughly aroused. The masquerading mademoiselle and her hero not being visible on the street that had been the scene of his discomfiture, he turned into the first he came to and had the satisfaction to discover them. He was soon near enough to see that he owed his downfall to

a man in the garb of a sailor. When Raymond and Mademoiselle Merigny finally paused before separating, Pierre took a mental inventory of the former's externals, and was confident he should know his man wherever he might encounter him. When Raymond had remained standing the prescribed time, and followed Edna, Pierre was no less on the alert to follow him. He saw him approach and examine the dismal house, and adroitly keeping himself sufficiently in the background to avoid being seen, saw or guessed at his after movements, and did not leave the spot till Raymond rushed away in the darkness. Pierre finally lost sight of him, in spite of his cunning, and proceeded toward his lodging in a feverish and dissatisfied state of mind. He had a vague presentiment that danger was gathering about him. So much did this work upon him, that he determined to play the last cards in his hand.

"It is time," muttered he, "to steal the golden egg and be gone. I remember madame's eyes; I cannot forget the chill that made me shiver all day. I have been such an excellent financier, that it will take me but a few days to gather together everything in an available form, then we will see if "my son Raymond will be rich." He who plays with Pierre Lereau must play fair, for he keeps a pack in his sleeve. De Villanville was too kind. A few mornings since he said: '*My friend*.' When a proud De Villanville calls me his 'friend,' I know it is time to be looking out for myself. Let me see; the number of confidants and accomplices are supposed to be pruned down to three—monsieur, madame, and myself. They wanted the doctor out of the way, because there were too many;

they secretly desired the same fate for Jean Louis, the bricklayer, because there were too many. There will always be too many until monsieur and madame alone hold these dark secrets in their possession. What if *I* say 'there are too many,' and begin with madame! How would that work? After madame, monsieur then there would not be 'too many.' Hold, there is Raymond; but he knows nothing of all this. Yet there is the property, which he would be embarrassed without. He is very sharp, and seems to be to the whole family what a ferret is to rats. In fact, the young man appears determined to run into the holes where the family secrets are. He frightens them both. Let me amend the suppositious programme: First, madame; second, monsieur; third, Raymond. That leaves me, the dupe, the tool, the hireling—the villain to let to the first proud, avaricious, wicked aristocrat that wants him. They think of me in that way. Yes, I am looked upon as a yielding fool, who, for a little money flung to me as one scatters grain to birds, is willing to commit crime for the sake of making a spendthrift of their son. What matters to me whether the young buzzard goes from his nest fledged or unfledged? Am I not a man too? Have I not claims on the world? Will it not be as pleasant for me to spend a fortune as for another? Of all the shallow fools, he is the most shallow who engages another to enrich him by complicity in crime; for the accomplice from that moment becomes more than a equal partner, and holds the knife to his employer's throat."

The further Pierre pursued this theme, the more intense became his indignation. His thoughts grew

darker than the gloom of the cloudy heavens over his head. It was in this mood that he came upon Jude Schwartz, who was sitting upon a curbstone, his back against a lamp-post, and his eyes closed in a sound sleep. Pierre stopped and looked at Schwartz.

"I don't know," he muttered, "but here's another *too many!*"

His eyes rested on a bottle lying beside the carrier, and the sight of it seemed highly suggestive. Pierre took up the bottle, removed a cork, and applied the nozzle to his nose. It contained just what he supposed—spirit. Some kind of a liquid trickled through Pierre's fingers into the bottle; the act did not consume much time, for the bottle was back again where he found it, within the brief measure of a few seconds. "There!" added Pierre. "May you find somebody to do for you, Jude Schwartz, what you have done for so many; that's the worst wish I wish you, you unclean spirit!"

Pierre Lereau passed on to the Old Barrack. His hasty, unequal strides soon overcame the distance. He stood where he had been more than a year ago, on an errand of no common import. There was Jean Louis' cottage; but Jean was not sitting at the door, as on that occasion. The windows were dark, and there was a piece of black crape tied to the door-knob. There was the peculiar air of a desolate and vacant house. Assured on this point, Pierre tried the door; it was locked. After knocking loud enough to awaken the Seven Sleepers, he put his shoulder against it, and burst it open. Producing materials from his pocket, he struck a light. The first thing he saw was a spot of blood on the floor. Although he hailed this

memento as an evidence of a fatal wound, it inspired him with secret dread. He then slowly opened the door to the room which Catholina had occupied. There was a medicinal smell there, which recalled to Pierre the mysterious sickness at De Villanville's. While he stared into the bare apartment and at the silent walls, his paper torch burned down to his fingers and went out. Afraid of the darkness, he ran from the cottage, and closed the door with a trembling hand. He did not remain long at the Old Barrack, but hurried away, with a mystic awe upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PRIEST OR A DOCTOR.

PIERRE intended to go to his new lodgings, but he changed his purpose, and turned his face toward De Villanville's. Arrived there, he found Joseph, the coachman, in great distress, rolling about on some straw in the stables, in a grievous state of bodily disquietude. Pierre, in answer to his friendly inquiries, extorted at first but groans and lamentations; and not being celebrated for patience, soon exhausted the little he had, and informed Joseph that if he persisted in tumbling about in such a clownish fashion, he should leave him to take care of himself. This brought the man to reason, and he began to use his tongue in a more coherent manner. "You had better go for a priest," he said.

"A doctor would be more to the purpose," answered Pierre.

"It's too late for a doctor, except a doctor for the soul!" groaned Joseph.

"Don't be a fool! Tell me what you've been doing, and where you've been. I smell spirit, Joseph, and, in my opinion, you're drunk."

"I've done nothing, except taking a little turn about the city. It being so dull and lonesome here, I couldn't content myself at home. A body must have exercise, Pierre.' After I had walked about an hour or two, to see if anybody was left that I knew, I started back again, but hadn't gone far when I grew sick and was seized with a dreadful pain in my stomach. It's the plague, Pierre, and there's no help for it!"

"Did you drink anything?"

"Yes; I found an old acquaintance, and I took a friendly drink with him from his bottle. Ah! Pierre, if there was nothing more the matter with me than that, I should be a happy man!"

"Oh! you drank with an old acquaintance!"

"His name is Schwartz. He used to be a coachman, like myself, but now he drives a dead-cart. Oh! oh! there is fire inside me! Water—water!"

"So you fraternized with that low wretch, and tipped from his detestable bottle!" said Pierre. "I shouldn't wonder if he carries the pestilence in that same bottle. You should have kept the width of a street between yourself and Jude Schwartz. Those filthy carriers reek with disease."

"Don't stand talking, but run for a priest. There are things on my mind that worry me."

"What things?" asked Pierre, quickly.

"My confession is for a priest, not for you. Besides, I have my doubts. I know nothing with absolute certainty, but, in my opinion, there has been wrong

doings. I can't die easy till I have lightened my conscience. I have kept dark when I ought to have spoken, and given up my place. You know very well, Pierre, that I have loved money too well, and so have you."

"Hush! These are the ravings of pain and delirium. Quiet yourself. We'll have a doctor, and cure you in no time."

"My master and mistress are not what they used to be," resumed the coachman. "They have changed greatly since De Noyan disappeared. Went away strangely, did their relative. Who knows where he went! There was something said about fever; but the fever don't burn up the body, does it? If one dies of fever, there's something left to bury, isn't there?"

"De Noyan," answered Pierre, "died from home, I believe. He, doubtless, shared the fate of the unknown dead. Who, think you, would open the trenches to find his body?"

"That won't do—that won't do!" cried Joseph, in a manner that startled Pierre. "You know more than that. There was mystery—a great deal of mystery at that time. De Villanville has been troubled, and—he always will be. Then there was the young woman, his daughter. She died by inches a long time, and finally died with the fever. Now, wasn't it strange that both should die of fever, with a year between their deaths? They hurried her into the ground. I tell you, I must have a priest!"

"I'll confess you," answered Pierre.

"You? Ha, ha! *You*, indeed! The devil will drink holy water when you turn confessor. As I said,

I know nothing for certainty; but I have not been hoodwinked; I could see a little. I could see the shadow of a hidden hand, and the half-faded lines of writing on the wall. Sometimes I was afraid. Wailing and strange noises floated out of the stables, I sometimes fancied, from the vaults, when the nights were very dark. But these were dreams—nothing but dreams. Then there was the doctor, who hasn't been seen since that night the coach broke down. Cursed be gold, Pierre! It makes one's conscience deaf, and dumb, and blind. Alas, this pain! Pierre, are you going for the priest? Do you want me to die dark and unconfessed? Don't you see how I suffer?"

"You'll be better by-and-by," sneered Pierre, whose evil disposition was now completely aroused. He no longer wanted a doctor for Joseph. He considered it the luckiest thing in the world that he had been the first to find him. He reflected upon the possible consequences if the coachman had unburdened his suspicions to one less interested. Chance seemed to play into his hand, and he exulted in it.

"You shall have a doctor and a priest, good Joseph. You shall have that ugly stuff off your stomach and off your mind. Long before morning you will find relief. These foul fancies will fly, Joseph. But if you should be so unfortunate as to slip through our fingers, Joseph, Jude Schwartz shall be spoken to. What is left of you shall visit the mud beds of the swamp. I will follow you myself, with black gloves."

The wick in the lantern gleamed down upon the ghastly face of Joseph, who lifted himself spasmodically, till Pierre thought he would actually get upon his feet.

"Are you mocking me, Pierre? Have my vagaries

frightened you? You won't be so cruel as to forsake me? No one can be so cruel as to leave a dying man. I must have the last consolations of religion. Go, man, go, if you hope for salvation!"

Joseph's voice was shrill with pain and dread.

"I'm going, Joseph—going. The haste that I shall make will surprise you. I should feel miserable if you should chance to die with anything on your mind."

Pierre's voice was cold, cunning, and remorseless; but the torture of Joseph, together with his anxiety for his immortal part, prevented him from noticing Pierre's manner.

"Take the fleetest horse in the stables," he said, "and ride as if a soul depended on your speed."

"Never mind the horse, my friend," replied Pierre. "These feet of mine are very reliable. You shall soon hear them flying up the street. Ha, ha, Joseph!"

Did Pierre laugh? Joseph thought he did. Laughter was horrible at such a time.

Whether Pierre laughed or not, he closed the ponderous stable doors, and locked them. The coachman heard the grating crash of the bolt as it went home, and wondered why his fellow-servant took that extraordinary precaution. He fell back upon his straw, very weak. For a few moments his consciousness was vague; but when his fluctuating faculties revived, the racking pain had subsided. His mind grew clear. He remembered what he had said to Pierre, and recalled, too, with fidelity, the deportment of the latter, with the peculiar emphasis on his concluding rejoinders. A ray of light streamed in upon his flickering life. He put a hundred circumstances together in an instant. The truth that Pierre would not return—that he had locked him

there to die alone, was as clear to his apprehension as if that individual had told him so without ambiguity. The conviction at first was overpowering; for he realised his inability to escape. There were windows, it is true, but he had not strength to reach them. Terror soon gave place to another emotion—indignation; and this feeling grew upon him so rapidly, that it soon affected every part of him, attaining the vehemence of rage, which acts upon the human constitution like a powerful tonic.

"He has shut me up," muttered Joseph, "to die without absolution. But I will live. I will disappoint the cold-blooded knave. I said things in my pain that frightened him. Pain knows no prudence: the fear of death disarms caution. Oh, if I could live!"

Joseph dragged himself to the tank where water was kept for the horses, and drank greedily. The draught extinguished the fire within him. A wonderful quietude soothed his frame; but one strong feeling remained—resentment against Pierre. He lay stretched beside the tank a brief time, not knowing whether this relief portended life or death. Presently he arose, fell, arose again, and by grasping objects within reach, steadied himself. He dragged a small ladder to a window with infinite toil. He consumed much time in placing it upright, and more in mounting it. Every sound made him fancy that Pierre was coming back, to find him alive instead of dead, as he hoped to see him. He was persuaded that violence would rob him of what life remained. If the horses moved their iron feet; if they pushed their provender about in their cribs; if the wind shook the doors, Joseph could only think of Pierre.

He reached a window, he poised himself in it, he drew up the ladder and lowered it upon the outside, then descending with feeble strength drew it down and pushed it into the river.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PIERRE LEREAU HAS A PURPOSE.

PIERRE LEREAU reached Dauphine Street quite satisfied with the concluding part of his night's adventures. Joseph had been used as an instrument on various occasions, and Pierre had been disposed to consider him an accommodating dupe with an easy conscience, which, like a weather vane, would turn to any quarter at the first breath of gain. He had at times suspected him of knowing too much; but the coachman's careless manner and persistent silence had disarmed his suspicions. It was all right now, however Joseph had taken his last drink, and was suffering the pains of dissolution. In the morning he would be found, cold and stiff, on the straw.

Such were his reflections as he cast himself upon his bed. Then came remembrances of the sailor and Mademoiselle Merigny. He resolved to explore and learn the mystery of that gloomy house, whither, he believed, he had traced the latter. He would know what it contained, and *whom*.

The next day he effected a stealthy entrance into a vacant tenement opposite the dwelling about which he was so much exercised. He watched until sunset, and saw nothing to reward his vigil. The shutters remained closed, and the street door was not once opened. If any one went out during the time of his surveillance,

they must have left by a rear door, and flitted away toward the Old Barrack to avoid observation.

Though disappointed, Pierre was not discouraged. He decided upon a bolder, more decisive expedient. Waiting till night was far advanced, he procured a ladder, which he carried a long distance on his shoulder through unfrequented streets and lanes till he reached the theatre of operations. After some mental debate respecting availability, he finally placed the ladder to a back window.

He mounted slowly, and not without anxiety. He was aware that he was incurring no trifling risk. Should he be discovered, any motive but the right one would be attributed to him; but after proceeding so far, he intended to see the adventure concluded.

Reaching the window-sill, he listened before trusting his head above it; hearing nothing, he took courage. With a chisel he prized up the window and raised it to the desired height. The shutters were still closed, but were readily pushed open. After remaining quiet a few moments, to see if his movements had excited any disturbance, he stepped from the ladder into the house, and found himself in complete darkness. Silence still prevailing, he drew a dark lantern from his pocket, and, unmasking it, turned its bright focus carefully about the room; it was vacant of human life and everything else, save dust, cobwebs, and a few crippled articles of antique furniture.

Pierre opened the first door he came to, and entered an upper hall or corridor. Thus far he had seen nothing to indicate that the place had inmates; but now, closing his lantern, and looking along the space before him, he saw a ray of light streaming from a

door slightly ajar. To this sign of human presence he cautiously advanced. He now made a discovery that satisfied some of his doubts. He saw Mademoiselle Merigny sitting at a table, reading by the light of a wax candle. Pierre was favoured with a good view of her face and person. He had seen her casually before, but not in a manner to impress him with her beauty, now it burst upon him like a soft and glorious sunset. Villain as he was, he could not contemplate the pleasing picture without emotion. He was unwilling to turn from a vision so attractive, and stood there some minutes held by the enchantment of Edna. Had she seen those eyes, her white shoulders would have crimsoned, and her cheeks flushed with maiden fear.

With a bitter regret for the unattainable, Pierre resumed his explorations, which had thus far been satisfactory. No light streamed beneath the next door, which was but a few paces from the other, and which he felt a strong desire to open. It was not locked; it yielded gradually to his manipulations. He listened, and hearing nothing to excite distrust, opened his lantern. There were various objects in the room, but he saw but one, and his eyes rested on that with an incredulity and terror that baffle description. His limbs shook beneath him, his eyes dilated, and his respiration was for an instant suspended. The spectacle that so wrought upon Pierre was Catholina calmly sleeping the sleep of innocence and beauty. Tranquillity and peace were mirrored on her reposing features. Her breathing was so soft, that she scarcely seemed to live. To Pierre, the snowy whiteness of her face looked like death, but death exalted and glorified

Pierre was disposed to consider this not a reality, but a supernatural exhibition to rebuke him for his sins. He retreated, shuddering: but not till he had shut his eyes, and leaned a little while against the wall, could he summon sufficient strength to fly from the house. He glided, trembling, from the corridor, with chilled blood and awed spirit. It was wonderful that he had presence of mind enough to escape from the house without creating a general alarm; but the ever present instinct of cunning did not entirely desert him. He roped from the window and down the ladder in some manner, he could not tell exactly what; but as soon as he reached the ground, he ran away as fast as he could. Exercise and the cool air soon began to restore him, so he stopped to think. He recollected that he had left the ladder against the house, and the window open; and retraced his steps to repair the oversight. If he had consulted his inclinations, he would not have gone back; for he believed it possible that he might again see that unearthly spectacle.

By the time he reached the house a few qualifying doubts had gained access to his mind; and a wholesome doubt is the beginning of truth. Resolutely shutting his eyes, he mounted the ladder, closed the shutters and the window, made a precipitate descent, and felt that he had acted discreetly. Carrying the ladder toward the neighbourhood of the Old Barrack, he hid it behind a fence, and started for Dauphine Street, his nervous system greatly disturbed.

Arrived there, and safely shut in, with his lamp lighted, the doubt which has been mentioned began to assume the dimensions of plausibility. The dead, he reasoned, seldom revisit the earth. Ghosts are usually

considered things of the imagination. He—Pierre—had never seen a ghost. Disembodied creatures must be very rare. They were universally scoffed at, while secretly held in terror, by mankind.

He considered the manner of Catholina's death. Her sudden seizure by fever, and her decease within the space of a few hours, were matters now mentally dissected by the thoughtful Pierre. Then there was the circumstance of the two carriers, which had never been satisfactorily accounted for. Was it not more probable, he asked himself, that Catholina had escaped through the agency of Dr Merigny than that she had come back a "dim-sheeted ghost," to haunt him? These cogitations, while they calmed his superstitious fears, excited others of a more worldly character. Dr Merigny had baffled the assassin, and still lived, he plainly perceived that there would be a grand *dénouement* at no very distant period.

Pierre drank copious draughts of brandy, and set forth for his master's chateau with a fixed purpose in his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RAYMOND BECOMES DECISIVE.

THE day spent by Pierre Lereau in watching the old mansion near the Barracks was passed by Raymond De Villanville mostly in his room, in serious meditation. By ten o'clock the following morning he had decided upon a somewhat bold step. He went directly to the place where he had last seen Mademoiselle Merigny, and standing before the identical door which had opened to receive her on that eventful night,

knocked determinedly, and waited for a response. No one came, and he renewed the knocking, resolved not to suspend his efforts till he had obtained the usual answer to such demands. After a long delay, a woman came; it was Suzanne, though quite unknown to Raymond.

"You have been making a great noise," she said. "Go away at once, and do not disturb us more. We are very quiet people, and have no visitors."

"I beg your pardon. Inform Mademoiselle Merigny that one Monsieur Raymond wishes to see her."

"Monsieur Raymond must be misinformed. I keep no mademoiselles."

Suzanne was about to close the door, but the young man prevented her.

"It will not do, madame. I know that she is here, and I will not go till I have seen her. Forgive my rudeness, but I will not allow this door to be shut. I will stand on this threshold till you have delivered my message to the lady."

"I will cry for help," threatened Suzanne, "and my husband will come with a pistol. I never saw such presumption!"

"It is not your husband that I want, madame. I have told you my wishes. Will you compel me to go in and seek her myself?"

Raymond pushed open the door, and stepped across the threshold. Poor Suzanne was bewildered and irritated by this bold behaviour.

"I shall have to scream!" she said, warningly. "I know there'll be bloodshed. My husband is dreadful savage!"

At that moment Mademoiselle Merigny herself

appeared. There was a slight flush of resentment upon her face; she looked haughtily at Raymond, who did not flinch, but bowed gravely.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "my presumption justly provokes your anger; but I deemed it necessary to see you. I entreat you to favour me with a few moments conversation."

Edna motioned to Suzanne to shut the door, then pointed Raymond to a room at his right. She did not speak; her silence was an eloquent reproof. Her white finger next indicated a seat.

"Mademoiselle, I dare not sit while your face is clouded with displeasure. I am aware that you desire to live here undisturbed; I know there is a great mystery over you. The singular pledge which I gave your brother was of itself sufficient to excite suspicion. Mademoiselle Merigny, I have had no peace since I first saw you. Your image has gone with me everywhere. I have been haunted—haunted by you! It was impossible to exist longer without speaking to you. I resolved that I would not love you longer in secret, but that you should know of the flame your loveliness and amiability has kindled."

"And so, monsieur, you take our house by storm to talk of love!"

Edna bit her lip, and her voice was less indignant than Raymond expected it to be.

"Is it, then, a crime to love so much as to overlook the conventional barriers of society? Would you have a tame, weak lover? Is not the genuineness of love to be tested by its daring?"

"You bring me, monsieur, what I have not asked for," returned Edna, coldly, quietly seating herself

"I know it!" exclaimed the young man. "I was sure it would be so, but I felt that I had no right to love you without telling you of it. My love might prove a curse to you; ay, it might be like the bite of a serpent."

Raymond spoke with all the impetuosity of youth and earnestness. Words flowed from his tongue like water; his eyes glowed with excitement, while his features worked with emotion.

"I have Doctor Paul," said Edna, uneasily.

"That is selfish folly!" exclaimed Raymond. "He is your brother. There is a love passing the love of brother—that leaves natural ties infinitely in the distance—that beggars consanguinity—that flies higher than heaven—that overtops all other human sentiments. It is this passion that transforms me; that fills me with pleasure and with pain; that gives joy and sorrow, hope and despair, ecstasy and agony, while the last is greatest. But you behold my tortures with calmness, my madness with serenity. Ah, mademoiselle, I thought you had soft pity; that your eyes would melt with compassion! The impetuosity of my wooing has confounded you."

"Monsieur, monsieur, you do me injustice. I am not the heartless creature you imagine. I do not look with indifference upon your madness; but, believe me, time will cure it. I have heard that these violent paroxysms do not long endure. Go, good Raymond, go."

Edna was now herself agitated. The commotion in Raymond's blood had communicated to her.

"You wound while you attempt to heal. You are deceived; my passion is as lasting as life; it will die only when the vital spark goes out."

"Enough!" said Edna, sighing unconsciously. "I have heard that this tale has been told ever since Adam. Why should I credit what has been repeated so many times with so much falsehood? But do you know, monsieur, that you have done wrong in coming here? Ought you not to have respected my wishes? Have we not weighty reasons for this retirement, think you?"

"What we love we pursue; nature furnished it, and I'll seek no other."

"Scarcely nature," answered Edna, "for nature is unobtrusive. Yet, Monsieur Raymond, I am too much disposed, considering your past kindness, and making allowances for your condition of mind, to forgive your terrible boldness."

"How can I thank you for those words?" cried Raymond, joyfully. "Your condescension and goodness fill me with gratitude. How beautiful is woman when she forgives!—how angelic when she is gracious. But I have more to tell you; I have deceived you."

"So soon, monsieur?" said Edna, smiling.

"Yes; you do not know who I am. I have kept from you a part of my name."

"It is not name, it is character, that one should wish to know," replied Edna, evidently interested.

"True—true! And mine, I trust, mademoiselle, is above reproach. My name is De Villanville."

Raymond pronounced this name with a trepidation that was manifest. He wondered what the effect would be upon Mademoiselle Merigny. He remembered that conversation, and those mysterious allusions to his family.

Edna's face flushed in an instant. The announce-

ment obviously surprised her. There was something akin to consternation in her expression.

"De Villanville!" she repeated.

"It does not please you?" said Raymond, in a melancholy voice.

"I confess that I was not quite prepared—I mean, monsieur, that the name—certainly, I have no right to be pleased or otherwise," stammered Edna.

"Perhaps, mademoiselle, the name of De Villanville may be unpleasantly associated? We sometimes confound a name with a disagreeable reminiscence. But I am taxing too severe your patience. I must see your brother. There are important reasons why I make this request. He attended one in her last illness who was dear to me. I wish to question him about that death-scene. Who, save yourself, so beautiful as Catholina?"

"A sister, perhaps," faltered Edna.

"My cousin," responded Raymond, sadly. "When last we met, she was the pearl of girlish beauty. Alas! what is she now?"

"Monsieur De Villanville," returned Edna, in tremulous tones, "I sympathize with your grief. Do not insist upon seeing Dr Paul to-day. Go in peace, and I will reflect on your request, and inform you whether it is best. If you entertain those sentiments for me which you profess to, defer a little to my judgment, and go hence at once."

"But where, mademoiselle, and when, shall I see you again?"

"At the house on Dauphine Street," answered Edna, hurriedly, "to-night, an hour after dark. That should content you, monsieur. It is much—it is too much."

"I perceive, mademoiselle, that my name is not pitious; nevertheless, I thank you for your condescension. I leave you, more charmed and enchanted than when I came, although a pensive, foreboding mingles with my hope. You bid me wait, and as so much goodness, I cannot but obey. I would that the remaining hours of day were annihilated, and were already night. Adieu, mademoiselle!"

Edna opened the door, and let him out in a single flutter of haste, then hurried to her chamber, unner and trembling.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PIERRE ARRANGES MATTERS.

By the time Pierre Lereau reached the chateau, was prepared to meet monsieur and madame, whatever the course of events might throw him in their way. He quietly gained access to the house, and silently busied himself until morning. He ransacked various desks, chests, drawers, placing sealed packages in small trunk, or concealing them about his person. A massive iron coffer was finally unlocked, and a cache of diamonds, some rouleaux of gold, together with bank notes to a large amount, were also transferred to the trunk. All this was done deliberately, and with scrupulous regard to method. Having packed the little repository very neatly, he locked it with an old looking key, which he put into his pocket. The trunk he carried to his sleeping-room, and deposited in a closet at the head of his bed. Having done this, he pushed the bed against the closet-door, and laid

scheming head upon the pillow, to sleep or watch till morning.

He might have drowsed, but his frequent starts and moans proved that he did not sleep soundly.

He had an interview with De Villanville and madame at an early hour.

"We have waited your coming anxiously," said monsieur, "and have deferred going to the country on account of your absence. What discoveries have you made? Is all as it should be, friend Pierre?"

"Monsieur, all is right. You have nothing to fear. Merigny will never come back. You can go into the country with mind at rest. I have watched that house night and day. Besides, another body has been found several miles below. It was cast upon the shore, dark and swollen. Monsieur, I could have given information, but I did not; I kept my secret."

"You feel positively certain?" queried De Villanville, with earnestness.

"There cannot be a doubt. You can join your son in the country with no distracting fears to follow you."

"You relieve me of a weight of apprehension. Pierre, you have been very devoted, and you shall not be forgotten. Madame"—he turned to his wife—"is it not singular that Raymond has not written? We should have heard from him daily."

"Monsieur must remember that hunting and fishing are irresistible attractions for a young gentleman like Raymond," interposed Pierre.

"Very true," said madame. "The poor boy has been so much confined at college that he will feel disposed to make the most of this freedom from restraint. Philip, we will go to-morrow. Pierre is so

faithful, we may trust everything to him. If we should lose Pierre, we should never find another to fill his place."

Madame De Villanville glanced kindly at her invaluable servant, who gratefully bowed his acknowledgments of her goodness.

"Pierre," responded De Villanville, "is part and parcel of ourselves and fortune."

Pierre modestly averted his eyes, and remarked:

"There has been black crape tied to the bricklayer's door for some days. The cottage is deserted. The plague followed up the first misfortune. I saw the tracks of a carrier's cart, and it was not the first time it had been there. Ah, monsieur, how fortune favours us! There will be no witnesses to rise up against us."

De Villanville and his lady glanced at each other.

"Good, faithful Pierre!" exclaimed the latter. "How you relieve us!"

"By the way, where is Joseph?" asked Pierre.

"He disappeared mysteriously. I can give no account of him," answered De Villanville.

"He was a drinking fellow, and I shouldn't wonder if we should find him dead in the stables," added Pierre.

"I have had the stables searched. Joseph, I think has run away," replied monsieur.

"That is very curious," continued Pierre, considerably disconcerted at this announcement. "I'll warrant however, the thriftless fellow will turn up somewhere when least expected. Shall I have your trunks packed for the country? I know you are impatient to see your son. He is a noble young gentleman, at Raymond," he added, rubbing his hands with apparent satisfaction, "will one day be very rich."

"So he will," said De Villanville, his countenance lighting up with a pleasant thought. "And I know of another person," he continued, significantly, "who will not die poor. One Pierre Lereau will also be rich, as the world goes."

"How indulgent are monsieur and madame. It is easy to serve such a master and mistress. I must procure another coachman. I will go straight to the stables and see if the horses are properly groomed. They must look sleek when you drive into the country to see Raymond."

"Pierre," said madame, insinuatingly, "we have a little surprise on foot for your benefit; but we reserve the right to keep our secret."

"You are too generous," stammered Pierre. "Every day you bind me to you by some new obligation."

"Go away, good Pierre," said his mistress, playfully. "Let the horses be carefully attended to. To-morrow, they cannot take us too rapidly toward Raymond."

"I will put the life into them, I'll warrant," answered Pierre, and withdrew, with another chill upon him.

"Damn their condescension!" he muttered, as he entered the stables with the ostensible purpose of looking after the horses, but really to inquire of the groom concerning Joseph.

But that individual could give him no information on the subject, having been absent at the time of the coachman's mysterious illness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

MADemoiselle MERIGNY reached her chamber, after her unexpected interview with Raymond, in a state of mind to her entirely new. Her strength, her composure, vanished the moment she was alone. There was an unwonted commotion within her. She made the discovery that she was interested in the impetuous young gentleman who had just left her. Love, like a serpent, had been creeping insidiously into her breast. She did not know of his presence till she felt his sting. In her pride, she would have torn it away and trodden it beneath her feet. She tried to believe that no wound was there, but the smart admonished her of its presence.

She bowed her beautiful head in vexation and shame. There was a picture before her eyes—Doctor Paul and Raymond, standing side by side. How could this be? Was she not content with Doctor Paul? Edna sighed, and the hot tears coursed over her cheeks. Within, there was the revelation of a new life. How it startled her! How it sent the blood thrilling to her cheeks and neck! How her firmness struggled with her weakness! How her pride battled with the new guest!

"Edna!"

It was her brother who spoke. She sprang to her feet, confused and annoyed.

"Doctor Paul, I wish you would knock when you visit me. This is quite rude, I am sure."

The doctor stood mute before her, looking her over with singular sternness. His expression alarmed her.

"You needn't terrify me, Doctor Paul. My nerves are not strong this morning. This business of yours has worn upon me. I don't like to be stared at, brother."

"Ah, Edna! how deceitful is woman's heart!" said the doctor. "Yesterday I thought myself secure in your affections; that I should always wear you near my heart, an unsullied jewel. But you are no diamond; you are nothing but paste."

"What do you mean, Doctor Paul?"

She looked consciously down.

"I mean that you are no longer a mirror of truth. Some one has breathed upon and tarnished you. You no longer reflect the image of Doctor Paul."

"Brother, what folly is this?"

"Yes," muttered Merigny, "he has entered the citadel; he is intrenched there, and all the brothers in the world can't drive him out! And a De Villanville at that!"

"What do you say, Paul?" faltered Edna, blushing crimson, her heart beating with secret dread.

"He has been here. I was forced to be a listener; I heard all that passed between you. I was not to blame that the door stood ajar. I would have gone out, but I could not pass you without being seen. Nay, do not look at me in that way! I protest that I could not help it."

"Neither could I help his coming. Doctor Paul, you are becoming a cruel tyrant. What is this man to me that you should so frown upon and rebuke me?"

Edna sank into a chair, and hid her face from her brother.

"If he were not a De Villanville, it would not be

so bad," resumed the doctor, pacing the room, much agitated. "But the son of an assassin! The heir of infamy! It is too much."

"Doctor Paul, you will kill me! You forget Catholina—the niece of an assassin, the heiress of infamy! Is there a world of difference between the son and niece?" Doctor Paul stopped walking; Edna's retort seemed to affect him like a bath of ice-water.

"Sister, how venomous you are! I really should be afraid of you, if you had a bodkin. I know you would stab me, Edna!"

"Brother, you draw nice distinctions. Is not your lily of girls a De Villanville?"

"Not so much as he. The De Villanville blood is mixed with a pure stream from the father's side. Then you have only to look at her, to see how glorious she is."

"Glorious! Did you ever hear *me* say that any one was glorious? That is a strong word. You have fallen into the pit where you are always ready to look for me. I see that you will never be happy without this pretty child. I suppose I must give you up; so go and take her. But, pray, Doctor Paul, don't rave any more about a young gentleman who never made love to me but twice in his life."

"Hear the little ingrate!" cried Paul. "Twice in his life! Isn't that enough? How *dare* he—without saying a word to me? And why did you presume to hear him?"

"Have you a mortgage on my heart, brother Paul! I mustn't breathe, I suppose, without the consent of a wicked brother. How many times have you made love to Catholina?"

"Not once, I protest!"

"*Just* once, Doctor Paul; and that *once* is all the time—with your eyes, you traitor—with your eyes! Haven't I seen your every look? Ah! if you would only look at me so! But you don't—you won't! You come to me with looks that would kill a tiger."

"You are a delightful creature! But this De Villanville is another affair."

"No one but you has said that he is anything to me. This is a story that you have composed yourself. You are a brilliant fellow, brother!"

"It's of no use, Edna; you love him. I never saw you blush as you blushed this morning. A common brotherly blush don't reach to the shoulders."

"For shame, Doctor Paul!"

"Indeed, a brotherly blush is just no blush at all. In truth, there's no such thing. Your face is as white, and bright, and sweet as morning when you kiss me; that is, it used to be; but now you have learned a new trade."

"Fie!" Her cheeks were red at that moment.

"And then a nocturnal appointment! *You*, the pink and pattern of womanhood!—the perfection of maiden modesty! I think the heavens will fall soon."

"Pause there, Doctor Paul. What have *you* done? You have killed and buried yourself for Catholina. You have cast fame and name to the winds. For a pretty slip of De Villanville you have ignored ambition, greatness, and even the human race. You came to me with a pitiful story; and I, like a silly, loving sister, went weakly into your service. I did not ask if it would benefit me; I only asked: 'Will it make Paul happier?' I always was your slave. I knew that you

loved her then, but I was patient and endured it. How ungrateful are brothers!"

"But this appointment. It is positively disgraceful! I shall go there myself, and tell him that he shall see you no more."

"What will you tell him about Catholina?"

"Nothing, nothing!"

"I shouldn't wonder, Paul, if Raymond loved his cousin."

"She has never mentioned him."

"A sure sign that she thinks of him. I foresee a rival in this Monsieur Raymond."

"But Catholina is dead—to him, and to all but this household. I shall not divulge my precious secret. Edna, I entreat you to be silent."

"I have been too indulgent with you, Doctor Paul. I am now going to be severe. I shall walk in the hard, beaten path of duty. You will not move me as you were wont."

"Sister Edna, will you deny me this one favour? Keep that sweet mouth silent a little longer."

"Ah! now it is a sweet mouth! How long is it since that came to pass, my poor suppliant? We change places now and then, I think. I hold you in my hand, Paul. If that cousin should bear her away, it would be infinitely worse than losing me. How do we stand now?"

Doctor Paul sat down, quite tamed.

"This is what it is to have a spoiled sister," he murmured.

"You have struck a lower key, have you, sir? You were singing too high for your voice, Paul. If you wish to propitiate me, you must humble yourself."

"This is quite complicated!" sighed the doctor.

"Did you not extort a promise from this 'son of an assassin—this heir of Infamy?'" added Edna, naively.

Merigny answered in the affirmative.

"Do you think he will keep faith?"

"Without doubt."

"Have you then so much confidence in a De Villanville?"

"He is one of an order that cannot betray a brother."

"You fraternize with him, it seems? Do you admit villains and assassins to your brotherhood?"

"Edna, you are too searching! I thought that you were merciful and tender. I don't like girl-lawyers. Your pertinacity troubles me a great deal. You talk very much at random about Catholina and Raymond."

"If you sue for peace, we will have an armistice."

"I would, were it not for that unmaidenly appointment, which humiliates me. If you were a common feminine creature, such a thing might answer; but as it is, it is absolutely beneath you, and not to be thought of."

"If you were a common masculine creature, you might love this pretty doll Catholina; but as it is, she is absolutely beneath you, and not to be thought of."

Doctor Merigny stared hopelessly at Edna, and did not speak again for some minutes.

"Let us compromise," said mademoiselle, at length.

"Present your articles," said Paul, submissively, kissing the pretty hand which she extended to him.

"*That* is one of the articles," said Edna, "and the others shall be presented after we both have had time to reflect. This niece and this son of an assassin must

be disposed of. I think, Doctor Paul, that we will throw them both overboard."

"One of them at least!" muttered Paul, walking thoughtfully from the chamber.

"And that *one* will not be *her*!" sighed Edna.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DOCTOR'S PATIENT.

DOCTOR MERIGNY next visited his fair patient, outwardly as calm as if nothing had happened to disturb his equanimity. Her improvement had been rapid; illness no longer kept her in bed. She arose when her kind friend entered, and received him with a glad smile. Returning health gave additional beauty to her face and person. She was never more lovely than then. Her eyes beamed with soft and radiant light; her cheeks were tinted with the faintest carmine of the rose, while her expression was ineffably sweet.

"Mademoiselle Theresa, you are gaining wonderfully," the doctor observed.

"Please call me Catholina, when we are alone; the other makes me feel like a stranger," she replied.

"I call you thus to become familiar with the name, so that I may not make a slip when it is necessary to observe precaution," returned Merigny.

"I shall be glad when caution becomes no longer needful. How strange and startling is my situation! Reflect, my dear doctor, on the change which has taken place in my life."

"I am not unconscious of that. It is indeed bewildering to think of. Do not allow yourself to

dwell too much on the horrors of that night. You have escaped—you are recovering—you are safe.”

“Safe? I wish I could feel so. Last night I dreamed—you laugh at dreams, I suppose, doctor?”

“Not *your* dreams, mademoiselle.”

“I dreamed that some one robbed you of your secret. I thought some one appeared in my chamber, and knew me. I was terrified, and awoke with a vague impression of a familiar face on my mind. I know it was but a vagary of night, yet it has troubled me.”

“Banish such feelings, mademoiselle. Dreams are but waves of latent thoughts tossed about by the changeful, undirected breezes of fancy. If I had dreams only to disturb me, I should be the happiest of men.”

“What should disturb you, my good friend? Has your care of me ceased to be a pleasure? If so, speak to me frankly. My happiness will be in consulting your wishes—in duty and obedience to a generous benefactor.”

“It is the thought of losing this sweet responsibility that ruffles my tranquillity. Could I always have the care of you, I should be content. He is my enemy who robs me of this privilege. You and Edna constitute my world. Bounded by you two, my desires are satisfied. I could pass my life here without weariness. Should I lose you, Catholina, I should be miserable.”

“This poor life which you have rescued, Doctor Paul, belongs to you. The solemn debt of gratitude can never be paid. You guided me faithfully through the valley of death; you lifted the black shadow, and I lived. You followed me through darkness and pain.

You sat beside me; you waved over me those friendly arms, and scared away the destroying angel. I took your word to die; I took it to live. I knew if I struggled out of that apathy and oblivion, I should see God or you. I saw you! Doctor Paul, I shall see you as long as it is your will. I shall go when you say 'Depart;' I shall come when you say 'Return.' I am not my own; I belong to God and you. All others have cast me off. By and through you and Him, I live."

Catholina's voice was like the vibrations of a harp. Every word was gentleness, every look sweetness, every cadence truth.

Doctor Paul listened with ineffable joy. The music and meaning of her speech swept away doubt and distraction. He knew she would be near him; that he should behold her from day to day; that her pensive eyes would still look thanks to him. Was it love? Perchance it would sometime grow to love. Such emotions might well ripen to that tender sentiment. So the doctor rested in hope.

"Catholina, how munificently you reward me! The wealth of your gratitude overwhelms me. I shall not ask too much of you; I shall be content with ministering to your happiness. Your love, Catholina, I dare not aspire to. Man is not worthy of it."

"Stop, my friend!" interposed Catholina, with a deprecating gesture. "You exalt me too much. You shock me! I am terrified by the towering height of your good opinion. Take me from this high pedestal or I shall fall. Doctor Paul, a fall would kill me! This glory that you see around me is but the reflection of your own goodness. You see in me that which be-

longs to yourself only. I shudder at the height you have placed me. Let me descend to earth; let me walk beside you, a mere mortal."

"Speak on! speak on!" exclaimed the doctor, in an ecstasy of delight. "I was never happy before."

"Ah, my friend, I have said too much."

"Do the stars shine too much?" asked Merigny, with a smile. "Is there too much music in the world? Do the roses bloom too often? Neither can you talk too much, my beloved. I drink from your lips as from a refreshing spring which slakes an eternal thirst. You say you will go when I say 'Depart;' that you will return when I say 'Come.' It shall be I who will do this. It is I who will be the vassal. You shall say, 'Doctor Paul, do this,' or, 'Doctor Paul, do that,' and by this dear little hand, I will obey."

Merigny gracefully took Catholina's hand, and carried it to his lips.

He heard a sigh at the door. Both looked up, and beheld Edna.

"Traitors! traitors!" she exclaimed. "I have caught you at last. Come! what have you to say? How will you justify this great wrong to me?"

Catholina did not blush nor start; she gazed tranquilly at Edna. It was the doctor who looked like a criminal.

"You don't answer," added Edna. "Guilt strikes you dumb. Ah, Catholina, you have stolen Doctor Paul! He is no longer mine; he has been swearing to follow you to the ends of the earth."

"Edna, you will annihilate mademoiselle!" cried Merigny, despairingly.

"I shall forgive Catholina, but not you. I shall prepare torments for you. Remember the charges you brought against me this morning. You were cruel as a tiger! You did not spare me when I was innocent."

"Sister, I have addressed none but the most respectful language to mademoiselle. This has not been a love scene. I have neither declared love nor asked hers. Mademoiselle is but a beautiful child. Look at her! See how serene and unruffled she is. Do you perceive any of the trepidations of love?"

Unfortunately for Merigny, Catholina began at that instant to be confused; the lily hue of her cheek changed to the prettiest pink.

"She is the pink of girls!" said Edna, laughing. "You have lost your lily, brother."

"I protest against this!" remonstrated Paul. "Your rudeness will kill mademoiselle. You are shocking—you are frightful! If you do not stop, I shall speak of your indiscretions; I shall betray that appointment. Ah, sister, to think that I should have to blush for you!"

"I can do my own, Doctor Paul. I warn you there will be no more compromise. The treaty is broken for ever. I have heard you, sir! I stood here, trembling with indignation. 'Is there too much music in the world?'" she added, mocking him. "'Can the stars shine too much? Do the roses bloom too often?' All this is very fine! Catholina, I wonder you have patience with him."

"It is *you* who try my patience," replied Catholina. "When you slander him, you sin against me. Has he not held over me the power of life and death? Shall I forget my death and resurrection? I am his and yours."

"We shall see—we shall see!" said Edna, more seriously.

"Mademoiselle Merigny, I was speaking of friendship. You will not mortify me by affecting misapprehensions."

"She was 'speaking of friendship,' Paul; do you hear? I hope you are satisfied? You shall not come here again to annoy mademoiselle. It is as much as I can do, who am your sister, to tolerate you. Brother, you may be dismissed a little while."

Mademoiselle Merigny took a book from the table, pointed authoritatively to the door, then seated herself beside Catholina.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CARRIER NUMBER ONE.

JOSEPH the coachman having escaped from the stables, hurried as fast as he could to the place where he had left Jude Schwartz. He was weak, and his limbs trembled beneath him; but exercise warming his blood, gave him new strength, and he felt quite restored by the time he reached the carrier's corner. He found him crouched under his favourite lamp-post, in great bodily distress, groaning and moaning most lugubriously.

"Ah, Joseph," he cried, seeing the coachman approaching. "I shall jolt no more of 'em to the swamp! The poor things'll have to get there the best way they can. To save expense, the whole population had better go out themselves, and wait their turn; and Yellow Jack wont keep 'em waitin' long, I warrant. No more dollars for me, Joseph! I sha'n't

hear 'em rattle any more in the bag. It's got hold of me at last, and is twistin' away in my stomach like a hundred corkscrews."

"Arouse yourself, Schwartz, and don't give way to it!" said Joseph.

"Don't give way to it! The saints give me patience. If I had a stone, Joseph, I'd throw it at ye. How can one help dyin' when his time comes? And as for the pain, I fancy you wouldn't bear it any better than I, interposed Schwartz, very ill-naturedly.

"It isn't the fever at all," said his friend, "but poison. I was seized in the same manner after drinking from your bottle. Come! you must get upon your feet, and exercise. If you lay here, you'll die."

"Not the fever at all," cried Schwartz, eagerly. "Then I am the luckiest fellow alive; for I swear to you, Joseph, I'll never die of anything but the fever. That I consider the proper way for me to go out of this world. Yes, that's the way I'll go, and be trotted out to the trenches in a jolly way, with neatness and dispatch. But are you sure, Joseph? Don't deceive a poor lad, who don't want to leave his horse and car and his canvas bag. If you had a canvas bag, and horse and cart, Joseph, you wouldn't want to give 'em up, to lay down like a worm in the mud."

"If you lay down in the mud this time, it's your own fault. Get up, Jude! You don't try to help yourself. If you'll exert yourself, I'll raise you on your feet in a minute. There'll be a crowd round you soon. There are two coming this way, now."

"My legs are cramped, Joseph. Rub 'em, and get up the circulation in 'em. This is a dreadful way to be in! What if somebody should want me?"

couldn't be able to accommodate a dead person, if he's ever so anxious to be tucked up in his last bed."

The two persons alluded to by Joseph now stopped in the walk, and looked at Schwartz. Presently, several others joined them, and began to make comments in regard to the nature of the carrier's malady.

"Spasms!" said one.

"Cramps!" suggested another.

"Convulsions!" said a third.

"*Rats—rats!*" exclaimed a fourth.

Every one looked at the last speaker with curiosity, who happened to be none other than Mousieur Commodore, Captain Triplett's friend.

"Who ever heard of rats in a person's stomach!" said the man who had suggested spasms; whereupon a laugh immediately followed at Commodore's expense.

A tall man had approached, and taken a position directly under the street-lamp, where he had silently listened to the remarks of those about him. He also turned his eyes toward the man who had assigned so remarkable a cause for Jude's sufferings. Something in his countenance immediately fixed his attention. The pallid, care-worn face had a singular counterpart somewhere in his remembrance.

"Rats—rats—rats!" repeated Commodore, impressively.

"That would be three rats, at least!" retorted he who had spoken before.

"Did you ever read of Mary Magdalene, that she had seven devils within her?" returned Commodore, sharply. "Isn't a devil bigger than a rat?"

"The gentleman argues like a lawyer."

"*Rats!*" said Commodore, emphatically.

At that instant the eyes of the latter rested on the face of the tall man nearest the street-lamp, when his features exhibited a remarkable change. Wonder, fear, curiosity, and surprise, mingled with a vague gleam of sense and recognition, were each mirrored upon his pale visage. He took a step toward Jean Louis—it was the honest bricklayer who stood under the lamp—though somewhat disguised; then stopping, made strange gestures in the air with his hands.

Jean Louis grew white with fear. It appeared to him that the ghost of the man in the wall had come to haunt him. An unspeakable dread fell upon him. While these two persons were staring at each other, Jude Schwartz arose upon his elbow, and forgetful of his pain, stared at Jean Louis. The latter suddenly turned and fled, Commodore darting after him.

"'Tis he—'tis he! 'Tis the rogue of a carrier number one!" cried Schwartz; and regardless of the numbness of his limbs, and the tortures he had been suffering, leaped to his feet, and followed, shouting:

"Stop him—stop him!"

"He's mad!" said Joseph, and pursued his friend.

Captain Triplett, seeing his companion and dependant starting in this unaccountable manner after a stranger, believed that his madness had assumed a malignant form, and ran as fast as he could to overtake him and prevent mischief. The others, impelled by a natural curiosity to know the result of such eccentric conduct, set off in similar haste, but were very soon left behind; so that those really interested had the race all to themselves.

The bricklayer was never before so thoroughly dismayed. If he had had time to reason and collect his

thoughts, he would probably have acted differently; but his utter unpreparedness for such a startling development completely upset his equilibrium. His mind being considerably disordered by the strain to which it had been so long subject, an event of this kind was more likely to affect him than at any previous period of his life. To his confused imagination, the inhabitants of the lower world were indiscriminately let loose, and were after him in full cry, an infernal, ghastly pack. Taking whatever streets were most convenient, he ran with surprising speed. The object of his terror kept near him some time, but finally fell exhausted, and was picked up by Captain Triplett, who was glad to abandon the chase.

The trial of speed now lay between the bricklayer, the carrier, and the coachman—the latter, however, being far in the rear. Jean Louis did not ask whose steps were echoing behind him; he thought only of that haggard face and those mystic writings in the air. He panted like a weary dog.

"That fatal wall! that fatal wall!" he muttered. "I am a miserable murderer. I should have said: 'Kill me, if you will, and build your own wall.'"

"Stop, you thief! stop, you *number one*! I see you—I know you!" shouted Schwartz, taxing every muscle of his body.

Poor Louis did not understand a word of this, but ran till the hand of the carrier at length caught him by the skirts of his coat and held him. The bricklayer fell to the ground, completely exhausted. Schwartz twisted his fingers into his neck-tie, and kept him on his back till Joseph came up.

"What are you doing?" cried the latter. "Has the

devil entered into you as he did into the swine? Why are you strangling this poor man?"

The coachman clasped his hands around the carrier's throat to choke him off, if violence should be necessary to prevent him from committing murder.

"Run for the cart, Joseph! You know where it stands. I have got *number one*, as sure as death!" replied Jude, much excited.

"I am mad, or everybody else is," said Joseph, dubiously. "What do you want with the cart? Are you going to bury as well as kill him?"

"I'm goin' to do neither, stupid! I'm goin' to keep him for monsieur. Monsieur will give money for him—money to chink in my canvas bag."

Jude took another turn in the bricklayer's neckcloth.

"Give money for him!" repeated the coachman. "The poison has struck to his head. I shall have to choke him."

Joseph gave the carrier's windpipe a squeeze.

"You don't understand me, Joseph," gasped Jude. "This fellow is a carrier; he stole a body, and monsieur wants the body."

"Oh, he stole a body!" said Joseph, relaxing his hold.

"Yes; your young master wants him, Joseph; and it is for him that I have had this race. Monsieur *will* know where the young girl is buried."

"Catholina!" said Joseph, in a low voice. "I know there was a mystery about it. I was in the stables when the cart came for her, at night. Presently, another came also. I never could comprehend it."

"Well, then, run for the cart."

"I'll go," said Joseph. "How is your stomach?"

"I don't know that I have a stomach. I'm thinkin' of the money in the canvas bag."

"I told you exercise would save you, Jude. If there is anything left in your bottle it must be carried to a chemist."

"The cart, Joseph—the cart!"

"With all my heart," responded the coachman, and scampered away with alacrity.

Jean Louis (who, tiring of confinement, had ventured abroad for that exercise which a life of labour had rendered indispensable) was quite confounded by the events of the last few moments. That pale face and neglected beard still haunted him. As he lay almost breathless on the ground, he looked wildly from side to side, expecting to see a phantom shape. As he recovered his senses, he became conscious of a hand at his neckcloth, which was holding him with a tenacious grasp. He heard voices talking about monsieur and the cart, and believing that he had fallen into the hands of De Villanville's agents, gave himself up for lost. He had escaped the dagger once but it was not his destiny to escape it again. Mentally, he bade adieu to Suzanne and his children. He felt that remonstrances would be useless, but there was no need that he should suffer before the time, so he said, faintly:

"Good fellow, do not choke me! I am too weak to run away."

"I'll only hold you tight enough to keep you for monsieur. What a great villain you are, to be sure!"

"Where is it?" asked the bricklayer.

"Where is what?"

"It!" replied Jean.

"Nobody knows where it is. I thought I knew,

but I didn't. It was carted about so much that it got terribly mixed up at last. But you'll have to tell, Monsieur Carrier, all that you know. If you are obstinate, torture will make you speak. You'll be thrust down among the vaults, my thiev'ing fellow, where nothin' but brick walls will hear your shrieks."

"Accursed be brick walls!" cried Jean Louis.

"You may well say so, when you stand within 'em, and your voice drops down dead upon the masonry."

"The murderer! I, too, shall be walled up! But I was too faithful to him. I kept his horrible secret till my life had been attempted. Good fellow, I have a wife and children."

"Then, for the sake of your wife and children, tell the truth when you are questioned. You must explain what became of it."

"You know as well as I. You saw it follow me; it kept close to my heels. I expected to see it when I opened my eyes. I dare not look far into the darkness, for fear that it will rise up, with its hollow cheeks and white lips."

"Monsieur Carrier, don't try your wit on me; save it until you are confronted by monsieur."

"My name is not Carrier, but Jean Louis."

"More wit," said Schwartz.

"By trade I am a bricklayer, and a luckless trade it has proved," muttered Jean.

"Puttin' 'em into the ground is bricklayin', isn't it? That's a new view of the business. Go on, you jolly number one!"

"I never was so terrified," resumed Jean, "although I protest that I have not willingly injured any one. Did you notice how fast it ran?"

"The body? Yes; I think it ran as fast as any corpse I ever saw," said Jude, ironically, supposing that the bricklayer was playing upon his credulity.

"A body it could not have been, for bodies cannot pass through brick walls. It was the ghost of the man in the wall. I remember his countenance as though it were but yesterday. Did you see him make those strange motions in the air? Did you observe the horrible quiver of his uplifted arms, as they fell slowly to his side? But he has no right to reproach me. I did my best. I would have saved him, but that was impossible."

"Don't play the fool!" retorted Schwartz. "You sent me wrong once, but you can't again. Here comes Joseph with the cart. You are not the kind of freight it has been used to carry, but I can break over rules for the sake of accommodating monsieur."

"Who are you?" asked the bricklayer, his mind becoming clearer.

"I'm one that earns his money in an honest way. This is my turn-out"—Jude pointed to his horse and cart—"and a very prompt and convenient concern it is. Get up, number one, and have a seat."

Jean Louis arose with a vague sense of recognition. The face of Schwartz, too, grew familiar as the bricklayer's confused faculties returned.

"Tumble in!" said Schwartz.

"A dead-cart!" muttered Jean Louis, involuntarily shrinking from the vehicle.

"A live-cart, too," said Jude, pushing him toward the conveyance.

"By this time the bricklayer's mind had nearly regained its wonted force. He began to feel the humilia-

tion of such treatment, and the cowardice of submitting without asserting his rights to freedom in the most decided manner.

"Take your hand from my shoulder!" said Louis, warningly.

In answer to this reasonable request, he received a provoking shake from the nervous arm of the carrier. Instantly the bricklayer let fly his fist, and struck his persecutor between the eyes such a blow that he fell upon his back. He would now have made good his escape, had not Joseph dropped the reins and caught him by the collar. A struggle now ensued, during which Louis used his clenched hand like a gavel, hammering fiercely at the face of the coachman, who defended himself stoutly till Schwartz came to his aid, when the bricklayer was finally overpowered, bound hand and foot, laid into the cart among spades, picks, ropes, and various other articles incidental to the carrier's business, and trundled away at a most uncomfortable speed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PIERRE LEREAU'S RECORD.

PIERRE felt uncomfortable about the disappearance of Joseph. In his own mind the coachman had been dead a day, and he had expected to hear of his having been found stiff on the straw. That was the most nervous day that he had experienced. Monsieur and madame had been too condescending; he was impatient for them to go into the country to join Raymond. His own particular line of conduct was marked out, and, as is apt to be the case when one has resolved upon

something of importance, he was terribly afraid that some unexpected turn of affairs might thwart his purpose. He wandered about restlessly. The sun trailed across the heavens with unwonted slowness. He affected to be very busy about many trifles, and was more obliging than usual. He made frequent visits to the closet that contained the little trunk, trying the lock again and again, to be assured that there had been no mistake growing out of too much haste.

On one of these pilgrimages to his chamber, Pierre was dry. There was wine in the closet, but he feared to taste it. He stole down to the wine vaults. He had often been there, although his descents had been less frequent the last year, during which period he had entertained a secret awe of the vault. He knew where the oldest vintage was stored; he could lay his hand on a bottle in the dark, but the dark was frightful to Pierre, and he never ventured there without a light.

The vaults were damp. Pierre went down and down. He stood on the earthen floor. The waxen candle he bore flickered this way and that, and the moist ooze under his feet chilled him. He hurried on. Supposing that this was his last visit to the wine-cellar of monsieur, Pierre unconsciously attached double importance to it, and superstitiously, and perhaps unknowingly, admitted within the mysterious chambers of his brain that if there was anything shut up there in the damp darkness that had vengeance to wreak on him, that opportunity, being final, would be seized upon and attended with extraordinary developments.

This inward distrust, this cowardly conviction of something horrible impending, made him quicken his

movements, and rendered him peculiarly sensitive to the slightest circumstance of his surroundings.

A rank and festering odour purred into Pierre's nostrils; it did not gradually come upon him, but seemed to strike him of a sudden while passing a portion of brick wall that had the appearance of comparative newness. He hesitated, then darted forward, and clutched the first bottle he reached. He knew it had age, for he felt the woof of the spider on its tapering neck. He knew his weakness, and realized his want of manly confidence. Knowing what his nerves required, he did not delay for corkscrew or glass, but dashing the slim neck of the bottle against the rugged masonry, it was broken off short and sheer as if it had been cut with a diamond. There was a report like a pistol, and then the imprisoned spirits effervesced, and streamed down the smooth surface in foam and bubbles. A rich odour, half neutralizing the scent of the vaults, hailed his sense of smell, inviting him to be quick; so he tipped the mutilated bottle to his lips, and it was half drained before he cast it from him. The draft was cool and refreshing, and he regretted the waste of that which trickled along the ground among the splintered fragments at his feet.

Sparkling old grape-juice has a bracing effect upon one's nerves, and Pierre experienced its potency. Taking another bottle from the shelf, he believed he should return with much more firmness. He prudently resolved not to look at the wall across the niche. His imagination called back too vividly the incidents of that night, when, pacing to and fro in the background with De Villanville, he watched the labours of Jean Louis. That hopeless cry that arose when the last

brick was placed had followed him ever since; and sometimes at midnight, echoing in the ears of his imagination, aroused him from sleep.

While he thought of these things, he fancied he heard a low murmur, like the melancholy ripple of a moaning voice. Pierre stopped and threw around him hasty and inquisitive glances. The darkness mocked his sight. The black space swarmed with shadows. He peopled the vaults in a moment with airy shapes. There was a rustle, a stir somewhere; he could not tell whether it was above or below, at the right or left, before or behind. The wine turned to water in his stomach; it lost its power to quicken his courage and bolster up his heart. The apprehensions of a guilty conscience were stronger than it. The new masonry stood out distinctly before him. He imagined he heard the clink of a trowel, and saw the haggard features of the man in the wall.

Holding tightly his bottle and the candle, and half closing his eyes, he rushed through the passages till he gained the steps, pursued by imaginary feet that fell upon the earth with a ghostly sound. He did not feel safe until he had reached his room, and sat a few moments upon the side of his bed. When the perturbation of superstitious terror had subsided, and Pierre's pulses throbbed more healthily, he was conscious of a drowsiness stealing upon him, and lay back upon his pillow.

This sleepiness grew quite irresistible, and his eyelids quivered and dropped. A tranquillity very unwonted soothed his recently-fluttering nerves. A taste remained in his mouth unlike the lingering flavour of wine.

It was not an hour in which he was in the habit of sleeping, and that circumstance occurred to him. The somniferous quietude became deeper, till a leaden weight rested on his limbs, and a dull pressure lent a stupor to his brain. Although thus physically and mentally beset, Pierre's habitual prudence was not overcome. He began to think that his sensations were unnatural. A single distrust was sufficient to arouse him. With an effort that one less resolute would have failed to exercise, he arose from the bed, and yawning, stood on his feet. He took a step forward and perceived that the room appeared to revolve like a top. He grasped a chair to steady himself. "This is not drunkenness!" he muttered. "One bottle never affects limb or brain. I can drink two, and walk without swerving."

He staggered to the table where he had placed the bottle just taken from the cellar. He examined the cork and the wire fastenings, and could not discover that it had been tampered with. But a rogue's suspicions are not easily satisfied; Pierre gave the bottle a second inspection, and was struck with the fact that the cork seemed new, and that the wire had not rusted into it in the ordinary manner of vintage long bottled.

"The wretches! the wretches!" hissed Pierre. "They have no gratitude. They would murder a faithful servant. The monsters have poisoned the wine. Ah, they have killed me! Monsieur and madame have been too good. *He* called me his 'friend,' and *she* had a 'little surprise' for me. *Mon Dieu!* This is the friendship—this is the surprise!"

Pierre stood with clenched hands, wandering eyes,

and blanched cheeks. His gaze presently settled upon the closet-door; he thought of the trunk and its treasures.

"If I die," he exclaimed, "my death shall rob them of the fruits of their crimes more effectually than if I live! But perhaps it is not too late. I may have an antidote for this accursed narcotic, which has the taste and sensations of opium. I know something of poisons; I have studied them, and I always had a fear that they would wish to be rid of me at last. 'Secrets keep best in one's own family,' is their motto. Assassins! was it for this I served you in your diabolical deeds?"

Pierre opened the closet, and unlocking a drawer, took from it a small box full of vials, with little slips of paper attached to each. He ran them over rapidly, and selected one.

"This must be what I want. I'll try it, at all events; it can do no harm. Let me see! How much is a dose? No matter; I'll take enough."

Putting the vial to his lips, he swallowed its contents, and replacing the box, evoked dire maledictions on the De Villanvilles.

Motion and fear had partially interrupted the progress of the narcotic, but it soon exerted its power again. Pierre noted its effects upon his respiration, which was becoming thick and painful. He looked in a glass, and perceived that his eyes were dull and expressionless.

"I'm afraid it is too late; but if it so proves, I'll leave a record behind."

There were writing materials on the table. He sat down, seized a pen, and wrote:—

"I die by poison, administered in wine by Monsieur and Madame De Villanville. I denounce them as the murderers of Philip De Noyan, and also of Catholina, his daughter. The first was bricked up, alive, in a niche in the wine-vaults, where his body may be found, in proof of this, my dying declaration; the second, like myself, was deliberately made the victim of poison. Her remains were hurriedly conveyed away by night, and buried with the common dead, it being reported she had died of yellow fever. Conscious that I may have but a few moments to live, and desirous to relieve my conscience of its guilty secrets, I furthermore dispose and say, that one Dr Paul Merigny was decoyed to De Villanville's chateau, for the purpose of giving an outside, respectable plausibility to her disease, as well as to obtain from him a written certificate of her death, and caused him to be assassinated on his way home. The name of the bricklayer—who was forced, on the peril of his life, to entomb the unfortunate De Noyan—was Jean Louis, who formerly lived in a cottage at a place called the Old Barrack, but who recently disappeared. The truth of these statements I solemnly vouch for.

PIERRE LEREAU."

Pierre had no sooner finished this than he was seized with violent pains; and fearing that his end was near, and not daring to leave the writing on the table lest it should fall into the wrong hands, he hurriedly approached the bed, and thrust it between the mattresses. A horrible retching ensued, and Pierre verily thought his last hour had come; but after copious emesis, he felt a wonderful relief, and took courage. From the dread of death, he passed to the hope of life. Pierre glanced at the closet and rejoiced; there was a strong possibility that he should yet survive the goodness of monsieur and madame.

"Ah! that 'little surprise'!" said Pierre, faintly. "Perhaps I shall surprise her who surprises."

Then he felt very weak, and sank into a deep sleep, which had troubled visions of vaults, and wine, and voices, and a man in the wall.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FATAL PAPER.

"WHAT has made the name of De Villanville so odious?" queried Raymond, after his interview with Edna.

"Rats! rats!" said a voice.

It was Monsieur Commodore who spoke. He stood looking into the young man's room, with a vacant expression.

"What crime has been committed? What wrong has been done?"

"In the wall—in the wall!" muttered the madman.

"My poor fellow, what do you mean?" asked Raymond, touched with pity.

Commodore looked earnestly at Raymond, then with his hands made mystic pantomime, which was at once responded to by the young man. The madman's face lighted up with satisfaction.

"So you are one of us?" he whispered. "Then I shall be saved. I shall observe your movements; I shall watch the mortar as it falls. If there is anything in it, I shall know. How rapidly the wall goes up! Leave an air-hole, good bricklayer—leave an air-hole! Just a little space that one can breathe through. Hear the trowel! Clink, clink!"

There was now a notable degree of wildness in the man's face. He trembled, and was manifestly suffering from intense terror.

"I would," said Raymond, thoughtfully, "that you could speak more to the purpose; that your mind would surrender this terrible secret that troubles you."

"They are putting in the last brick! They are

shutting out the light! Now come darkness and suffocation. What is this? It is a lump of mortar. No; it is a knife."

He paused, and his mind, with the eccentricity of madness, seemed to pass to another subject.

"Why do I listen?" mused Raymond. "These are but the ravings of a maniac."

"Rats! rats!" hissed the madman, crouching and shivering.

"There's something terrible about this man!" soliloquized Raymond. "I never hear his mutterings without being shocked."

"Once in the drain," continued Commodore, "keep on, and fight your way through. You may yell, and shriek, and howl, but you can't scare them away. Hurry—rush—dart, and plunge frantically beneath the waters. Teeth and claws will soon relax, as you drift strangling along. It will be pleasant drowning—vastly pleasant—and the roar and rant of the river will be music in your ears!"

"There is a certain degree of coherency in these mutterings," said Raymond. "He tells the story of an incarceration and an escape. He makes me shudder! I will listen no longer. Adieu, monsieur. Business obliges me to leave you."

"Rats!" said Commodore, gravely; and Raymond heard him repeating the word till he reached the street.

"It was now about twelve o'clock; there was half a day between him and his appointment with Mademoiselle Merigny. He would pass the intervening time as best he could. He had resumed his disguise, and felt that he could walk the streets with perfect immunity from discovery.

He had not proceeded far when he was overtaken by Jude Schwartz, who was mounted on his cart, with Joseph—the coachman—beside him.

"A jolly trade," said the carrier; "and the silver links every day in the canvas bag. Ah, Joseph! now's my harvest!"

"The harvest of death!" said Raymond.

Schwartz reined up his horse.

"What are you saying, my sailor lad? Don't you like my callin'? Aren't I a blissin' to the community? Haven't I done my duty by the tarpaulins and the short jackets? Ah, Jack! I know of many feet that never'll mount the riggin' again. Some of 'em didn't pay very well, either. Throw me a piece of silver, Jack, to make it even between us. You'll find 'em in the trenches, Jack, with hosts o' picters in indelible ink of anchors, and women-folks, and whim-whams on their yellow bodies."

"Come down from your cart, Schwartz. I want to speak to you," returned Raymond.

"Hillo! what have we here? It is the voice of monsieur himself."

"Be silent!"

"Tis too late, monsieur Raymond. I know you," said Joseph. "A lock of dark hair is visible beneath your yellow wig. I know the De Villanville nose, and mouth, and voice."

"I have found carrier number one!" cried Schwartz. "The villain gave me a hot chase; but I took him. Look at this mark between my eyes, will you? It came of his fist, monsieur. The rascal took my measure on the ground. See how Joseph is battered, too! But we overpowered the obstinate dog at last,

tied him hand and foot, and gave him a ride on my cart that made him groan, I'll warrant you!"

Raymond stood looking all this time at Joseph, querying what to do with him.

"Why are you not at home, Joseph?" he asked. "Why do I find you mounted on a carrier's cart, at an hour when your services are usually required elsewhere?"

"I have left the service of your father, Monsieur Raymond. I never shall crack whip over horse of his again. We are done—De Villanville and I," said Joseph, respectfully.

"So Monsieur Raymond is young De Villanville?" exclaimed Schwartz. "I knew there was some mystery."

"Why have you left my father's service?" asked the young man.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; but things did not go to suit me. Neither did I like Pierre Lereau, who locked me in the stables to die alone of a strange malady. I wanted a priest and a doctor, and he would bring neither. By the providence of God, I climbed out of the window, and the poison did not prove fatal."

"Poison! Who poisoned you?"

"I wish I could tell you. I drank with Schwartz from his bottle, and we both came near dying. Some villain had put poison in his bottle while he slept."

"I think it was that same Pierre," said Jude; "and on account, too, of that body which there has been so much trouble about. How much have I suffered by means of carrier number one! But all this burial business we'll soon get at, for we've got the fellow safe

and snug. You can go and question him as soon as you like. Joseph will take you to him. A trusty fellow is Joseph."

"Where have you put him?" Raymond asked.

"I hope monsieur will forgive the liberty," answered Joseph; "but considering the importance attached to his safe keeping by Jude, I locked him in one of the vaults under the chateau. I happened to have the key of the secret entrance, having lately been employed by monsieur to store some wine in the wine-cellar, and also to scatter lime upon the floors, on account of the disagreeable odours that have crept in from a drain."

"It was rather a summary proceeding, my good fellows, to incarcerate him in this manner. Nevertheless, I am glad you did not allow him to escape. Your zeal shall be remembered. Joseph, you will take me to him immediately."

"I will willingly serve Monsieur Raymond, but I must keep out of the way of Pierre. I am watching Pierre. Whoever finds him out, will discover a great villain."

Raymond gave Schwartz some money, and he and Joseph set off together. Approaching the chateau as quickly as possible, they gained the private entrance to the vaults without being observed. They had no sooner entered and advanced a few paces, than they discovered Pierre making his way to that part of the wine-cellar from whence he had taken the two bottles.

"Come with me!" whispered Joseph; and stealing up the steps that Pierre had just descended, the moment his wax candle had disappeared in the darkness, he conducted Raymond by private staircases to the room he was wont to occupy in the left wing of

the chateau. Having secured the door, Joseph drew Raymond's attention to a small hole he had made in the wall.

"I made this, monsieur, for the purpose of watching Pierre, whose room is next to mine. He has been gone several days; but you see he has come back at last. I shall get track of him yet."

"It is strange that you watch him, Joseph. This house and its inmates are not what they used to be."

"Monsieur never said anything truer. I hope nothing will happen to make any of us miserable. But I am only a poor servant, and have no right to hear, or to see, or think anything."

"For heaven's sake, Joseph, be silent! I am nearly distracted. You need not wonder if I go mad."

"If you think so, smother the fatal curiosity that urges you on. I have seen that you are troubled. If you would be happy, go abroad. Travel; divert yourself; but never, *never* come here!"

Joseph looked compassionately at Raymond.

"I cannot comprehend you, Joseph," answered the latter, gnawing his lips. "Your insinuations are insulting to this house. The name of De Villanville is above reproach, notwithstanding the accursed chain of circumstances that has gradually, and with singular pertinacity, linked itself together in my brain. These things that made me anxious are but trifling coincidences, magnified and exaggerated by a disturbed imagination. I have been a fool! I have been cruelly unjust to those to whom I owe the first and greatest duties; Joseph, I pardon your presumption."

Joseph sighed, shook his head, looked at the floor,

and returned no answer. Presently some one was heard ascending a staircase.

"It is Pierre," whispered Joseph. "I know his step."

A moment after, Pierre entered his room. Joseph looked through the aperture, and saw him sitting on the bed, much excited. He then placed a chair so that Raymond could easily observe him, which he did with increasing curiosity. He could hear, too, very plainly; and when Pierre began to realize his situation, and mutter, and threaten, the young man's interest became painfully intense. It was true some words escaped him, but enough reached his ears to terrify him. He readily understood that Pierre believed himself poisoned; that he sought for an antidote in the little box; that he meant to leave a record behind that should criminate his supposed assassins even after his death, should the antidote prove unavailing. He watched the progress of the writing, and saw the paper hidden between the mattresses.

Joseph stood behind him; and looking over his shoulder, also witnessed these events. Neither whispered their thoughts, although the coachman pitied Raymond's distress.

As soon as Pierre Lereau had passed the painful ordeal that followed, and, weak and exhausted, had fallen asleep, Raymond, making a gesture to Joseph to remain motionless, went softly on tiptoe into the next room; and thrusting his hand between the mattresses, secured the fatal paper. He was outwardly firm, but his face was quite ghastly in its pallor.

Joseph, contrary to his wishes, had followed him, and now caught him by the wrist, whispering:

"For God's sake, don't read it, monsieur!"

Raymond pushed the honest coachman aside, and hastily descended the stairs. Joseph followed him anxiously and sorrowfully to his own apartment, surprised at the calmness which he exhibited.

"My good young master," essayed Joseph for the last time, "burn that paper. You will be happier for it."

"Sit down, good Joseph. Do not fear for me. You shall see that I am a man."

Raymond pressed his forehead a moment with his hand, then held the paper before his swimming eyes. The writing was bold and distinct. The words seemed to rise up to meet him, as if in haste to impart their fearful secrets. He read it twice, without an exclamation or the perceptible quiver of muscle, then he laid his head on a table and did not speak for a long time.

"My dear master," said the faithful Joseph, "do not believe all that is on that paper. Pierre is a great rogue!"

With a sickly smile, Raymond passed his humble friend the paper. He read it; and knowing so much, was sure of its truth. Raymond considered him attentively, while he perused the tell-tale document.

"Well, Joseph?" he queried, hoarsely.

"One should believe nothing without evidence," faltered Joseph.

"True, my friend; yet you believe it all."

"It is too monstrous to believe! Drink some wine, my master."

Raymond made an impatient gesture; and seizing a goblet, drank a large quantity of water.

"Joseph, is there any air in this room?"

"Monsieur, I have opened all the windows."

"The air seems on fire! Have *they* gone, Joseph?"

"They go to-morrow."

Raymond swallowed more water.

"Joseph?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Get a crow and a hammer, and we'll visit the vaults."

"O monsieur! you are frightfully calm! Why don't you rave? Why don't you cry out, or weep like a woman?"

"Joseph, God may have some mercy on us! Get the implements and let us go down."

"Wait till to-morrow," suggested Joseph. "Why this haste?"

"I cannot bear suspense; proof itself is better than it."

"Perhaps you are right. If resolved on it, I am ready."

"Thank you, kind Joseph! Let us go," answered Raymond, huskily.

They descended to the vaults, Joseph leaving him but a few moments to procure the necessary implements.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BRICKLAYER.

"MONSIEUR?"

"Joseph?"

"This Jean Louis affirms that he is a bricklayer. Let him take down this wall. If that be his trade, he can make an opening more quickly and skilfully

than I, without disturbing the inmates of the chateau. He can replace it again, if necessary."

Raymond was looking hopelessly at the new masonry, which stood out palpably in the light of Joseph's lantern. But too rapidly he recalled the words of Merigny. He knew why the latter had linked the name of De Villanville with crime. What infamy was in store for him and the guilty pair to whom he owed existence! Dr Paul was alive; there were drops of comfort in that.

"What name did you pronounce, my friend?"

"Jean Louis."

"Is not that name on the paper?"

"Heaven is mysterious, but just, monsieur. My blood thrills in my veins. This is the bricklayer who reared this wall. Yes; the name is Jean Louis."

"*Mon Dieu!* Is not the hand of Providence manifest in this? Bring him forth, Joseph."

"Shall I leave you in darkness?"

"I fear not darkness: hasten."

Joseph and the lantern disappeared. Raymond paced to and fro before the wall, half stunned by the terrific disclosures that had destroyed every prospect in life. All those sudden perturbations of his father and mother were now understood. He apprehended why the diamond trowel had startled monsieur. The unwholesome ooze of the drain! he recollected that, too, and the sensations it had produced. How frightfully complete was the whole chain of evidence. Alas! for the De Noyans! Poor Catholina!

"You will be rich, Raymond—very rich!"

How shocking were these words. Here was the

motive—the key to unlock the winding labyrinth of crime.

“Oh, God!” exclaimed Raymond, “why hast thou made me the instrument of this discovery? It was their love of me—morbidity and overgrown—that tempted them on to murder. Better had they loathed me!”

He heard Joseph coming, and turning slowly beheld Jean Louis, the bricklayer. His face was colourless, and fixed in its expression as marble. With glassy eyes, he stared at the wall; it had been built more than twelve months, but still looked strangely new, in contrast with the adjoining masonry.

“Is your name Jean Louis?” asked Raymond.

“It is,” he answered, without looking at the questioner.

“Are you a bricklayer?”

“I am,” said Louis, in a sepulchral voice; “but I’ll build no more walls! You may kill me, but my hand shall not touch the trowel. I have committed one awful crime against humanity, and God has punished me. Ye assassins and murderers! Jean Louis is not the weak coward that he was.”

The bricklayer manifestly expected death, and was resolved to meet it firmly.

“Take down a portion of that wall!” said Raymond, pointing to the implements Joseph had provided.

Jean Louis gazed steadily before him.

“It is not to build a wall, but to demolish one,” said Joseph, shaking him by the shoulder to bring him out of his stupor of dread. “I swear no one will harm you! This man is no criminal who commands your service.”

“I remember the two masks!” muttered the brick-

layer. "Do not wall me up, I entreat of you, but shoot me, or run me through the body! I know why the wall is to be opened. Ah! that is too horrible!"

He shivered.

"The two masks are not here," added Joseph. "This is young Monsieur Raymond De Villanville, and I am Joseph, the coachman. We are not here to perpetrate crime, but to unveil it. You are as safe as if with your wife at home. Speak to him soothingly, master. He is half dead with remorse and horror."

"Curb your terror," said Raymond, kindly. "You are not the only one who suffers, Jean Louis. I am the son of him who caused this wall to be built. It is I who need pity, not you. Look at me, and see if there is crime in my face."

The bricklayer for the first time noticed Raymond; his thoughts began to descend from the dizzy height of fear which they had gradually obtained through the pressure of circumstances that had surrounded him for the last few hours.

"You only wish to look in?" he said, in an altered tone.

"Here are implements," said Joseph.

"Will monsieur give me his hand?" asked Jean Louis, vibrating between hope and fear.

Raymond extended his hand, and the bricklayer grasped it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I begin to believe you Swear to me!"

"By what shall I swear?"

"By the east, the west, and the south."

"I swear!"

"That I am safe?"

"That you are safe."

"Give me the tools; come nearer with the lantern."

Louis spoke more calmly, although his hand shook as he inserted the point of the crow between the bricks, which gradually yielded to his efforts. One was removed, and then another and another, each successive one giving him less labour. The mortar rattled upon the floor, while a sickening odour rolled out of the niche.

Joseph turned away, nauseated. Raymond did not move, and the bricklayer kept steadily at his work, expecting every moment to behold a shocking spectacle. A pile of bricks accumulated on either hand of Jean.

"Remove a few more at the bottom," said Raymond, in a suppressed voice.

The bricklayer obeyed.

"That will do. Stand back. Give me the lantern, Joseph."

The light had fallen feebly across the narrow chasm and wall. The niche looked black and impenetrable to the eye. Louis had seen nothing, and had studiously avoided glancing into the space. He was glad to retreat. The stench was nearly overpowering.

Raymond advanced, and held the lantern within the niche. Joseph could not perceive that he shuddered, or manifested any irresolution; but he could not but notice that his lips were white and his cheeks colourless.

The foul gases extinguished the light in an instant, and Raymond stood quiet while Joseph relighted it. He waited, too, with the same impassiveness for the confined air to escape, then made a second attempt. Joseph anticipated seeing his young master recoil, and

fall down insensible; but no such thing happened. After standing a few seconds, Raymond wedged his body through the chasm, and was within the niche. In his mind, there was a grim and mouldering skeleton; but in that narrow space there was none. There was a rusty chain on the floor. Where was the man in the wall?

He turned the lantern from side to side, till it rested upon a hole in the stone masonry. What a herculean effort had been made for life! The shock of discovery had now come; he should find the body burrowed in the earth, like a worm, where he had dragged it in the last wild efforts of his despair. An examination revealed a drain beyond, with its sluggish current of filth. Crawling forward through the jagged passage, Raymond held the lantern into the pestilent stream. Immediately there was a hurried pattering of feet, and an innumerable army of rats went splashing along the drain. One, bolder than the rest, leaped upon Raymond, and was followed by another and another, till a stream of them poured over his person. With a single recoil, he gained the niche, then sprang from it, shuddering at the contact of those damp, slimy feet. The rats swarmed after him, dispersing in the extended vaults, leaving trails of filth as they went.

"Rats! rats!" exclaimed Raymond, thinking of Monsieur Commadore, the madman.

"Joseph, where does this drain lead?"

"To the Mississippi," said Joseph.

Raymond staggered, and leaned against an angle of the wall. A new and well-nigh overwhelming conviction forced itself upon him. He was faint and weak.

"Brick walls, and rats, and drains," he muttered,

"He's going mad!" whispered Joseph.

"The coincidence is extraordinary. It is—it *must* be so. Rats, drains, walls, a plunge into the river—it is De Noyan himself! The incarceration and the vermin drove him mad. They attacked him in the drain. No wonder the shock overthrew his reason. *Mon Dieu!* there will be one murder the less."

"This is too much for you, monsieur. I entreat of you to come away," urged Joseph.

"Let us hasten; it is very damp here!" said the bricklayer, trembling.

"Lead on, Joseph; our business for the present is ended here. Jean Louis, follow us. I thank you for your services. We must talk together of another subject. I am your friend. See what a fiendish troop is pouring from the drain! Hasten, Joseph."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CASE TRIED.

"EDNA?"

"Doctor Paul?"

"Shall you keep that appointment?"

"I shall. I cannot forfeit my word."

"Very well, sister. I shall accompany you."

"Thank you. You are very good, Dr Paul. It would be quite embarrassing to go and return alone, although I'm sure nothing would happen. You can attend me to the door; then I will go in and tell this young man he is a De Villanville, and I can see him no more."

"But I must hear you tell him he is a De Villanville. He is so handsome and insinuating, that I dare

not trust you with him. His sophistry would sweep you away in a moment. What is woman's reason to man's art?"

"You make me feel *that* every day, Dr Paul."

Brother and sister looked at each other affectionately.

"Really," added the latter, "I was quite imprudent to listen to him. I feel vexed with myself. What can he wish to say to me? Pity my confusion, Paul."

"You would have gone without those blushes, had I not chanced to overhear you," retorted the other, gravely. "Put on your hat, mademoiselle, and let us go. The promise is made, and must be kept. It is already dark."

Mademoiselle Merigny could not conceal her embarrassment. She shrank from the eyes of her brother, and would gladly have recalled her engagement. She attired herself for the street with far less composure than usual.

"Spare me your reproaches, brother. I believe it was compassion for the poor young man that made me humour his wishes. Think how terribly he is placed. Is he not one to whom should be extended the helping hand of sympathy? His impetuosity, too, carried my assent by storm. I could not forget his kindness to you—I mean his kindness to me when your absence so alarmed me. It is but just that he should receive every courtesy from us. On his account you ought to pause and forego your vengeance. Let God punish the guilty."

"I may be the humble instrument He uses for the punishment of the guilty. Shall crime go unrebuked? Shall infamy wear a crown of glory? Edna, the De Villanvilles must fall!"

They were now in the streets.

"Think well of this, Paul."

"I have thought, and shall follow where duty leads, though the way be rough and thorny."

"I will not argue, for argument ever made you more obstinate. But mercy seems more becoming to the human character than justice; the first forgives, the second inflicts pain. Here we are at the door. I tremble, Paul. Do not be too stern with Monsieur Raymond."

"I shall consult my own honour and yours," answered the doctor, ringing the bell.

While he was waiting to be admitted, he read his placard in the window: "Gone out. Will be in soon." Vividly these simple words recalled to him the thrilling events of that exciting night when he first saw Catholina. The woman who had so perplexed Raymond opened the door, and greeted them in the most cordial manner. Her countenance had now meaning and vivacity. "In there," she said, pointing.

Edna and the doctor passed slowly into the apartment so familiar to them, and where the former had, on another occasion, received Raymond. It was dimly lighted with a single wax candle. Raymond stood in the background, and bowed slightly as they entered. His features were no longer pale, but flushed; while his eyes were preternaturally brilliant.

"You will pardon me," he said, "if I have been too prompt. I have not forgotten, sir"—to the doctor—"that this is your house. I was bold enough to ask the honour of seeing Mademoiselle Merigny for a few moments; but you afford me double pleasure by coming yourself."

These words were uttered in a tone of voice that left Merigny in doubt in regard to their meaning.

"Monsieur Raymond is very obliging," he said, stiffly. "Both of us, I believe, are indebted to your kindness."

"And you wish to pay the debt?" interposed Raymond. "Is it not so?"

The doctor was slightly embarrassed, while Edna secretly enjoyed his confusion.

"I regret," resumed Raymond, "to hear you speak of trifles that are not worthy to be remembered. It is not needful to give importance to such matters, in order to rid yourself gracefully of an undesirable acquaintance. I am one easily shaken off. I seldom aspire to that which is unattainable, or humble myself for that which is selfishly withheld. That I have been charmed by Mademoiselle Merigny I am free to confess. I know of nothing dishonourable in admiring that which is worthy of admiration. In presuming to love your incomparable sister, I am sure I offer no disrespect to you. Though she is dearer to me than life, she is not dearer than my honour. Mademoiselle," he continued, turning respectfully to Edna, "I did not intend that you should hear so much from my lips, but it being true, you will perhaps pardon it for truth's sake."

"What does this exordium portend?" asked Merigny.

"Much, very much!" exclaimed Raymond, in a voice that made Edna start. "Things will be said in this room that I trust in God never will be repeated out of it. Doctor Paul Merigny, what have you to urge against my name and fame?"

"This is extraordinary language!" said the doctor.

"Nay, good doctor, do not evade me; come to the point. Is not my name known to you?"

"It is."

"As a gentleman and a man, and as the brother of mademoiselle, what charges have you to bring against the name of De Villanville?"

"The conjuration is strong," answered Merigny, uneasily, "but you will pardon me if I remain silent."

"With what *I* know, and *you* know, that is impossible," responded Raymond, pacing hurriedly to and fro.

"Doctor Paul," said Edna, in a low voice, "do you not perceive that something has happened? Mark the wildness of his manner! His eyes burn like lamps!"

"I know not the extent of your knowledge," the doctor replied, "but if you have learned any secrets peculiarly mine, it was certainly without my aid and consent."

"If I ventured to aspire to the favour of Mademoiselle Merigny, should you not most strenuously oppose my wishes?"

"I should."

"And yet you would give no reason?"

"None," said the doctor.

"Except that I am a De Villanville," added Raymond, in a melancholy voice.

"Why should we prolong this interview? Do we not understand each other?" said Merigny.

"We do *not* understand each other. I understand you, but you do not me. I know what is in your heart."

"God forbid!" cried Doctor Paul, quite startled.

"The moment has arrived when disguises and con-

cealments must be stripped away. You would lay the accusation of murder against the house of De Villanville. You would drag the guilty inexorably to the tribunal of justice. You, who have had so much mercy, and expect so much, would show none."

Monsieur and Madame De Villanville are the greatest of criminals!"

"Doctor Paul! Doctor Paul!" cried Edna.

"Mademoiselle, let him proceed. Doctor Merigny, name the first crime."

"Unhappy young man. Why do you urge me to this? Why could you not have spared yourself and me this painful *dénouement*? Do not force me to go on. From my soul, I pity you. But I see you are resolute. You have nerves of iron. Ask Jean Louis, the bricklayer, where the first great crime was committed."

"In the vault?" said Raymond.

"Your uncle, Philip De Noyan, was bricked up, alive, in a niche. That was the first crime."

"The man in the wall was the first crime. What was the second, Doctor Merigny?"

The doctor recoiled before the young man's searching eyes.

"The second," he faltered, conscious of his own duplicity, "was the poisoning of Mademoiselle Catholina, your fair cousin."

"She died of poison, doctor?"

Raymond looked at Merigny, earnestly.

"Poison, administered at different times," asserted the latter.

"Will you have the goodness to look at this paper?"

It was the certificate of Catholina's death. The doctor glanced at it and changed colour.

"Yes," he said, "I wrote that from motives of expediency."

"Very well; now for crime the third?"

"My own life was beset on my return home. I slew the slayer, and barely escaped with life."

"The fourth, if there be indeed another?"

"The attempted assassination of Jean Louis, an honest bricklayer, who was torn from his family at midnight, and compelled to build the fatal wall that entombed poor De Noyan. It was for this act that his life was beset."

"You have indeed brought a fearful array of crime against those whom nature and duty teach me to love. I marvel not that you would rescue Mademoiselle Edna from a De Villanville. Here are shame and infamy enough to prevent me ever holding up my head again among men. But though I cannot exonerate, I may palliate these acts. First let me assure you that I relinquish all thoughts of Mademoiselle Merigny; that I abandon happiness and every place that has known me; that I shall soon be dead to her, to you, and to all who have seen me or spoken my name."

"Monsieur, monsieur," interposed Edna, "why should you bear the sins of others so heavily?"

"Mademoiselle, I thank you for those words. They assure me, at least, that your sympathies rise above the terrible circumstances that hem me in like a wall of fire. Now I will proceed to extenuate, as I may, the errors that have embittered my existence."

Raymond paused, advanced to the door, and called.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

Immediately a step was heard in the doctor's office, and a man with haggard cheeks and neglected beard entered the room. Merigny and his sister started involuntarily to their feet.

"Who is this?" demanded the doctor.

"The man in the wall!" answered Raymond, with *empressement*. "It is the unfortunate De Noyan."

"Impossible! Young man, do not trust to artifice," exclaimed Dr Paul.

"Question him," replied Raymond.

"You have heard what this young gentleman has said?" queried the doctor, fixing his regards on the man called Commodore.

The latter turned his eyes vaguely to the ceiling, and said:

"Rats! rats! rats!"

"This is a maniac," said Merigny, with a reproving frown.

"Stoop low! Stoop low!" added the madman. "Tear them from your face and throat, and dash them into the filth. Hurry—hurry—you will be overpowered! One brave dash and you will reach the river. Ha, ha! Rats! rats! Accursed be drains and brick walls, and riches and brothers!"

Doctor Paul glanced at his sister.

"Paul, my mind intuitively seizes the terrible truth," she said, hurriedly.

"De Noyan—Philip De Noyan?" said Raymond.

The madman started as from a dream, staring wildly around him, then relapsed into unmeaning vacancy.

"*Catholina!*" said Raymond, softly.

"Oh, God!" cried the man, in a touching voice. "What was that? Did I not hear a strain of music?"

He looked at Edna.

"Was it you, fair one! Strike that note again."

Doctor Merigny was agitated. The name of Catholina had affected him. It was like a talisman, awakening at once his hopes and his fears.

"*Catholina!*" repeated Raymond, still more gently.

"Catholina!" reiterated the man with the haggard face. "There was once something good, and sweet, and beautiful, associated with that name. What was it, I wonder? Where am I? Good bricklayer, note this sign."

Tenderness, wildness, and fear each struggled for expression in his face.

"Is this artifice?" asked Raymond.

"No, no! 'tis truth," answered the doctor.

"By the east, and by the west, and by the south!" muttered De Noyan, holding up his thin, white hands. "By the square, and the compass, by the mallet, and the chisel, by the three great lights of the immemorial brotherhood!"

The transparent hands waved and flickered in the air like the fitful flames of an expiring candle.

The doctor sank into a chair, quite overcome, while a pale gleam of hope and joy fluttered over the face of Edna.

Raymond led De Noyan to a seat, saying:

"Most injured of men! heaven will yet pity you."

"The vermin do not trouble me so much," sighed the madman. "I will remain here; it is best that I should not go away."

Edna was affected to tears, and even Merigny, the stout-hearted, found it convenient to cough and avert his face.

"Is it proved, or is it not proved?" demanded Raymond, who continued standing, and whose countenance was gradually becoming pale.

"Proved!" responded Merigny, sincerely, then added: "Monsieur, I beg of you to be seated."

"With the second part of this strange history," the young man continued, "you are but too intimately acquainted. You acted, at first, in harmony with the best dictates of humanity. Should I live to be as old as the world, I could not thank you enough. It only remains to me to ask you to restore to me my sweet cousin Catholina."

Doctor Paul was now deadly pale. He arose, drew forth his handkerchief, wiped the trembling drops from his brow, and sat down again.

"I have but one hope," added Raymond, "and that is Catholina."

Edna looked breathlessly at her brother. She wondered what he would do? She queried if his honour would remain unsullied and transcendent?

"I cannot be false," gasped Merigny, "though my happiness hung on a lie! I make no unmanly evasion; I deny nothing. But she is mine. I snatched her from death! I prevented a murder. Do not rob me of one who is so endeared to me. You do not know what I suffered. The horrors of suspense are terrible."

"I know all; I have the confession of Jean Louis, the bricklayer."

"Then you have the truth."

"Do you not see the moral? The crimes that you

charged upon those not to be named by me have not actually and in verity been committed. Dr Merigny, give me Catholina, and let us part."

The face of Paul Merigny was the picture of dismay. He glanced hopelessly at Edna, who said:

"This demand is but reasonable, brother. He has but her left; the others are dead."

"What can I do?" faltered the doctor. "Shall I tell her to leave me? Must I say, 'Catholina, choose between a De Villanville and a Merigny?' What right have you to demand this? Was it your skill that detected her peril? Was it your invention that saved her from impending doom? Was it your heart that ached and agonized over her long and pulseless trance? Was it your face that she saw when she came back out of death and darkness?"

"Jean Louis has faithfully narrated the thrilling story. I know what you suffered in those long hours. Her beauty charmed you, while her danger inspired terror. Who could resist Catholina? She is whiter than the lily, sweeter than the rose. There is but one other on earth so beautiful. One might break his heart for her without shame."

"Catholina, Catholina," murmured De Noyan, with an effort at memory.

"You will drive me mad!" gasped Merigny.

The doctor turned once more to Edna; he noted her flushed cheeks and moistened eyes, her clenched hands and heaving bosom. He walked across the room before he ventured to trust his voice. He came back, and standing near Raymond, pointed to Edna.

"Is she not as fair?" he asked.

"Catholina alone can compare with her. I shall

bear away with me an undying remembrance of her surpassing loveliness," said Raymond, fervently.

"Edna, plead with him. He will grant to you what he will not to me."

"Paul, you over-estimate my power. Besides, he is a De Villanville. We cannot compound and compromise with a De Villanville." Edna smiled faintly.

"We can—we can! I yield. I will object to nothing, so that your happiness be secured. Monsieur Raymond, you shall not leave us. If you visit other lands, it shall be with us. We will be a party of four. But you never shall take her from my sight. She is necessary to the sum of my happiness."

"Cease, I entreat! You will kill mademoiselle with shame. Her cheeks glow with resentment," cried Raymond, amazed at this turn of affairs.

"If I interpret rightly, it is not resentment?" answered Merigny, gently.

"Heartless brother!" murmured Edna. "Your trading propensity quite shocks me. I believe you have no sense of delicacy. So you would bargain me away. Ah, what boldness. How can I sit and hear you? Women, Dr Paul, are to be sought. Do not imagine I have no modesty because I have been such a doating and fond sister as to be blind to your faults. What must Monsieur Raymond think of me?"

"He told you very plainly, sister, I thought, when I overheard him this morning," observed Merigny.

"He would sacrifice me to a De Villanville, but, as a woman, I must have my own way. I will but amuse Monsieur Raymond while he bears off the prize. I will promise no more."

"For your unmerited condescension," cried Ray-

mond, dropping upon one knee, "I humbly kiss your hand."

"For Paul's sake," answered Edna, "and your misfortunes, I fear I shall be but too good-natured."

"Catholina shall be kept as a hostage," said Merigny, whose face now was wonderfully cheerful.

"Improve your time, Doctor Paul, while I keep this young man at bay. When I have lost you, I'll go into a convent. I was once your idol, but now you have no worship but for Catholina. Monsieur Raymond, I warn you of Doctor Paul! He has been false to me, and he may be to you. He keeps no treaties, and is the cruelest, kindest, dearest, and most inconstant fellow in the whole world!" said Edna, playfully.

"These De Villanvilles are not so bad, after all!" quoth the doctor. "Edna, you might let Raymond press the tips of your fingers. Ah! let him come with us to see Catholina. You can take his arm, and he will, perhaps, soften your resentment as you walk. I will follow with De Noyan. He must see his daughter; possibly the sight of her may restore his reason."

"Nay, brother, you lost *your* reason by seeing her."

"I shall find it again. And then you are so very reasonable, that the loss of mine can scarcely be felt in the family. There! proceed. Raymond, be good enough to lend Edna your arm."

So the little party left the house with very different feelings from those that agitated them when they entered it. The doctor went away without the desire of retribution, Raymond without despair, and Edna with the warm glow of a new sentiment in her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE meeting of Raymond and Catholina was deeply affecting. He received her with tearful thankfulness, as one given back from the dead. Of the causes that had led to her temporary oblivion, nothing was said by either. Respect to his grief kept Catholina silent on every topic calculated to give pain. Gradually, he informed her of the unexpected restoration of her father. He did not tell her all the circumstances connected with his sudden disappearance, but wisely left that task to Doctor Merigny, who could communicate the details at such times and in such manner as he deemed less likely to shock her. He gave her to understand that illness had disordered his mind, and that it was hoped by the doctor that an interview with her would be the means of his recovery. The sight of her might possibly touch a responsive chord of memory, and reason return in a moment.

When Catholina had become sufficiently calm, the experiment was tried. De Noyan was led into the room where his daughter awaited him—the latter having been instructed by the doctor. No one spoke. De Noyan's eyes wandered about till they rested upon Catholina, where they remained fixed. Various emotions were then apparent.

"Father!" said Catholina.

The sound struck home to his heart.

"Father!" she repeated.

De Noyan trembled and breathed hard.

"My father, do you not know your Catholina?" added the daughter, throwing her arms around him.

"Who speaks? Who is this? What dream comes to me?"

Tears flowed from his eyes; they rolled down his cheeks.

"You recognise your Catholina, do you not, father? Speak to me!"

Nature proved stronger than madness; it burst the chains of insanity, and the captive mind went free.

"My daughter! my daughter!" he cried. "My life! my darling!"

Full recognition followed; and no one who witnessed the scene will ever forget it. There were no dry eyes there and then.

Raymond had other and less pleasing matters to engross his attention and call him away. The night was quite advanced when the young man, with melancholy footsteps, approached the paternal chateau, which never looked so dismal as on this occasion.

"Ah," he sighed, "what a change will be here. Had ever son such terrible duty to perform? But can I make them more miserable? Alas, no! Their cup is already full. It shall be mine not to reproach, but to soothe and comfort. Who knows that, after this hour, we shall meet again? The sight of me will be painful and humiliating, calling back but too vividly the remembrance of their sins."

Raymond was about mounting the steps, when the door was softly opened and some one glided out. It was Pierre Lereau, with a little trunk in his hand. Raymond stepped back into shadow, somewhat, and when Pierre descended, sprang forward and caught him by the throat. The fellow struggled violently to free himself, but Raymond's hand clutched him firmly.

"Villain! robber! assassin! Did you think to escape unknown and unpunished?"

"Ah, it is you, is it?" gasped Pierre. "What means this violence? Let me go, I say. Fool! You'll be sorry if you don't."

Pierre drew out a pistol; then for a moment the struggle became fiercer, and the weapon exploded. Pierre tried out and ceased to resist; he had received the contents of the pistol in his breast.

"Ah, God! I die!" he exclaimed. "I have been the dupe of the De Villanvilles. I have been inveigled into crime, that you, Monsieur Raymond, might be rich; that you might scatter gold with both hands. Behold my reward. Look between—look between—the—the—mat-tresses of my bed, and you'll find my last—last will, and testament. It is all I can do for you. I die the dupe of the De Villanvilles. This is the reward of service. Accursed be the wages of the wicked. Raymond—Raymond—you'll be—ha, ha!—you'll be *infamous*! What word shall I carry to—to *De Noyan* and—and *Catholina*?"

Raymond saw his eyes shining like glass in the dark.

"None, none," said Raymond. "De Noyan escaped—*Catholina* lives."

Pierre's face paled over in death before the wild stare of wonder had faded away. His head dropped lifeless upon the little trunk. Raymond left him there, and entered the mansion. He went straight to the drawing-room, where he had seen a light from the street. The family had not retired.

"Here comes Raymond," cried madame. "I know his step. Ah, my son, this is an agreeable surprise. We are going to join you to-morrow."

Raymond embraced her, then pushed her gently from him. He shuddered when he thought of the spirit that was within her.

"Raymond, my boy," said his father, "you have not been very dutiful. You should have written."

The voice of monsieur was mournful

"My son," exclaimed madame, "your eyes are strangely wild. I hope you have not been drinking to excess. We have had the carriage put in order; we were going in the morning."

"Yes, you will go," answered Raymond, "but not in a carriage. The water will be the best for you. It is healthier, mother, the other side of the sea."

Madame looked at her son wonderingly.

"There is blood on your hand, Raymond!"

"And on *yours*, madame!"

Madame glanced uneasily at her hand.

De Villanville's attention was no longer wandering, but fixed on his son.

"What is that frightful stain, Raymond?" queried madame, with a slight tremour.

"The blood of a villain, madame."

"Ah! have you committed murder?"

"Pierre is dead. He lies at the door, with a little trunk, containing, probably, the fruit of his villainies, beneath him."

"Philip, Philip," exclaimed the lady, looking fearfully at her husband. "Do you hear what he is saying?"

"Perhaps my father expected his death," added Raymond, marvellously calm.

"Expected his death."

De Villanville's voice was quick and startled.

"Sudden deaths occur at this time more than any other," said his wife. "This pestilence cuts people down in an hour."

"Pierre Lereau," added Raymond, "did not die of poison; he died of a pistol-ball."

"Of a pistol-ball," repeated madame, still looking at her husband for support.

"Yes; you need no longer fear him. His accusing voice will never be heard. The dead tell no tales. Mother, the play is over. Far be it from me to utter reproaches or heap contumely upon your heads. It is enough that you will never know peace more, unless God in his mercy compassionates you."

Raymond spoke with stirring solemnity. His father and mother shrank from him with unspeakable dread; a nameless terror was at their hearts.

"Philip," shrieked madame.

"Leonora," gasped her husband, "it was reserved for our son Raymond to do this."

"We have loved you," faltered madame, "as never parents loved son!"

"I know *how* you have loved me. Would to God that you had hated me! That you had strangled me at birth. That you had buried me alive. That you had consumed my vitals with slow poison! That you had hired a villain to assassinate me as I walked the streets by night!"

A shriek, such as was never before heard in the chateau De Villanville, echoed and re-echoed through its solitary rooms. It might have been heard down to the vaults.

"Mother of God, Philip! The long agony is over at last."

She clasped her hands, the picture of unfathomable grief and dismay.

De Villanville turned his back toward his wife and son, and then followed a stunning report. He did not fall. Raymond rushed to him. He had attempted his life. His under jaw was shot off. He had placed the muzzle to his mouth, but through too much haste, had done the fearful work imperfectly. Tottering, with a hollow groan, he sank to the floor.

There was a rustling of feet and an opening of doors. Catholina and De Noyan, her father, entered.

Raymond saw only the mutilated form of his father, who raised himself feebly, and stared at De Noyan and Catholina.

Madame looked up, shuddered, shrieked, and became unconscious.

"Father, forgive me!" entreated Raymond, falling upon his knees. "These are not shades of the departed, but realities. De Noyan escaped through the drain. Catholina was saved by Doctor Merigny. In very deed, you have not committed murder. De Noyan, speak! Catholina, speak!"

"By the mercy of God and Jean Louis, I live," said De Noyan.

"By the mercy of God and Doctor Merigny, I also live," said Catholina.

The voices recalled madame from her swoon.

Monsieur held up his hands; an expression of gratitude and joy beamed from his eyes, which trembled a moment and then closed for ever. Their last look was upon Raymond.

Madame De Villanville was conveyed from the room **insensible**. Months elapsed before she recovered her

reason. Raymond watched over her, meantime, with the most devoted affection; and it was his love that finally wooed her back to conscious life. Her penitence was undoubted and deep, and without affected demonstration. Catholina saw her but a few times. The delicacy of Raymond prevented the silent reproach of her presence. Finally madame disappeared, and the world knew her no more; but it was reported that she had immured herself in a convent. This was probably true, for Raymond was known to make frequent visits to a distant monastery.

The next year a party of five persons, attended by two servants, one of whom was the faithful Joseph, travelled through the most interesting countries of the Old World. These were Doctor Paul and Catholina, who found it impossible to live apart; Raymond and Mademoiselle Edna, who had compromised so thoroughly that the doctor no longer feared a rival; and the fifth, De Noyan, whose health and happiness seemed complete.

Jean Louis, the bricklayer of the Old Barrack, and Suzanne, his wife, kept the old chateau during a protracted bridal tour; and neither were haunted by the sound of a trowel in the vaults below.

THE END.

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